



*Alone
in the Purple.*

Californi
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IRENE GREENE OWEN ANDREWS

Irene Owen Andrews
Neuschwanstein
Bavaria -

Oct. 1929

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Alone in the Purple.

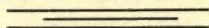
By
Clarissa Lohde.

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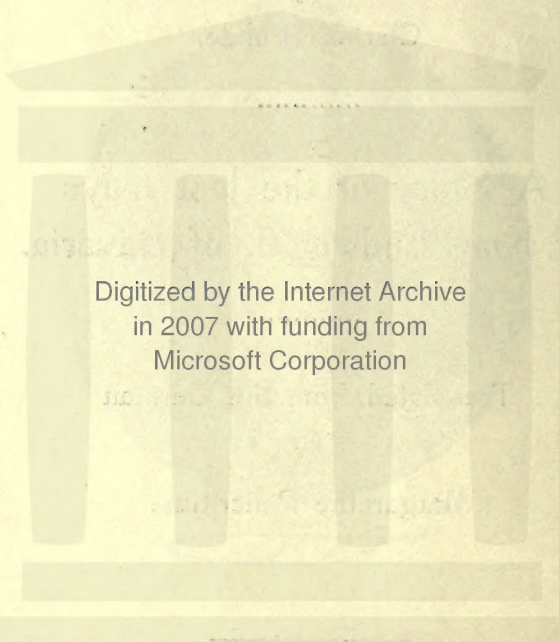
A Story of the last Days
of King Ludwig II. of Bavaria.

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Translated from the German
by
Margarethe Pancritius.



Nuremberg.
Carl Koch.



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Chapter I.

On a clear Autumn morning a young man with a knapsack on his back could be seen walking briskly up the King's highway. The road in its many windings offered magnificent views, here a glimpse of a quiet valley, there a wood encircled cloister and higher up sharp, craggy rocks rising against a background of snow-capped peaks. The young man lifted his hat, and gazed admiringly about him. His fresh young face showed no trace of care or sorrow, and his brown cheeks spoke of health and love of life.

As he was about to proceed, he noticed a cloud of dust rising at the turn of the way near the convent, and he had hardly time to step back, when a carriage rolled past him. It was a light hunting-wagon drawn by a splendid span of golden brown horses. The only occupant of the vehicle sat motionless wrapped in his mantle, his hat drawn closely over his face.

"The King," murmured the young man and a troubled look came over his joyous face. He continued his way thoughtfully and soon reached the gate of the Royal Park, through which the carriage must have just passed. The gate had quickly closed, and a guard, walking to and fro, answered his inquiring look by pointing to the road of the Almen Inn as his probable destination. He lifted his hat and took the direction indicated. Another turning revealed the castle towering above the dark foliage, its reflection appearing in the crystal mountain

lake at its feet. At a little distance, on the heights stood another imposing, but unfinished building. The young man stopped again and gazed at this magic picture rarely equaled in its romantic beauty. This splendid structure of noble proportions, defying the forbidding rocks, gave from its bold watch-tower an eagle's view of mountains, woods and lakes. Nevertheless the brightness disappeared from the face of the youth, who now walked on rapidly and within half-an-hour stood before Almen Inn, which with its projecting roof and surrounding balconies presented an inviting air.

The landlord in his stately mountain-costume stood in the door and greeted his coming guest. Within the open kitchen, working at the polished hearth, could be seen a bent, old woman and a pretty young girl, both dressed in the becoming costume of the land.

"God greet you, young Sir! A fine morning for a walk," said the innkeeper, opening the door for the stranger.

"Yes, indeed," answered the latter, who seated himself at one of the freshly laid tables and ordered luncheon.

"Where are you bound for? if I may be so bold as to ask," inquired the landlord seating himself near his guest for a chat.

"One or two hours farther to Forester von Feldau's," answered his guest frankly. "Have you a boy, who can show me the way?"

The landlord bowed out of respect for the name Feldau, and said: "O perhaps you are Herr von Randau, the new student, whom the Forstmeister is expecting."

The young man, somewhat astonished, answered:

"Yes, George von Randau is my name, but how do you happen to know it?"

"O quite simply, Sir. This gracious family often call upon me. My cousin Resi, who keeps house for me, served for a long time some relations of the Forester's wife. Moreover, if my young Sir would be pleased to wait a little, he could ride to the Lodge with Frau von Feldau herself. She just drove past here to the Convent with the young ladies and must soon return."

"Thank you, Sir," answered George. "Frau von Feldau would scarcely have room for me in her carriage."

"Quite probably she would, Sir. She is very obliging, and is like a mother to all the young students, even though she herself is still young."

"I believe it. Herr Professor Wallburg has told me of her," was the reply.

"O goodness," cried a voice from the kitchen, out of which the pretty maid had just stepped with the lunch he had ordered: "O goodness," repeated the same trembling voice. "A friend of Herr Romuald! The young gentleman will pardon me, if I sit down a moment to hear about him," and entirely disregarding the landlord's frown, she carefully dusted a chair with her apron and seated herself near Herr von Randau.

"You must know, young Sir, that I knew Herr Romuald, when he was a little boy. I kept house for Castellan Sternau in the castle lodge at the Seeschloss for ten years after he lost his wife, till — God rest his soul — God took him too. He was the brother of Herr Romuald's and Frau von Feldau's mother and they two came often to see Franzel. You have surely heard of Franzel, the beautiful daughter of Sternau, who once sang on the

stage and then went into a convent. Yes, she became a nun, Sister Euphemia, and it is eight years to-day since she went there."

The landlord hemmed and interrupted the old woman with marked annoyance: "Why all this gossip, cousin? These are old stories, that would not interest this young man."

The old woman lifted her apron and drew it across her eyes. "Yes, yes," she nodded. "They are old stories, but Herr Romuald will have forgotten them as little as I. He has lived single, because he loved Franzel so well. Ah! When I think, how happy she would have been with him! how happy if —"

"Be still, cousin, be still," said the landlord again. "You say more than you can answer for. Isn't it so, Bärbel?" said he to the girl, who had just finished setting the table.

"Yes, indeed. We have no time to talk more. We must hurry now."

"Good, good," said the old woman as she rose. "You want to get rid of me for fear I shall tell what I know and what I have seen. Don't look so cross, I am going, but, young Sir, when you see Herr Romuald, tell him, he must not forget old Resi and he must come here sometimes, where he is in these parts, as Frau von Feldau always does, for she is good and does not forget her younger days. One must say that for her." Whereupon she nodded again to the young man and followed Bärbel into the kitchen, shutting the door behind her.

"You see, sir," said the landlord turning apologetically to the young man, "that my cousin says foolish things, which you must not believe. She was engaged to Burdach, the valet of His Majesty, whose sad

end — even though he was a good-for-nothing and deserved his fate — greatly affected her mind. Otherwise she is an able woman and a good worker.”

“I have, indeed, heard of the singer, Fräulein Ster-nau,” answered George, “though Professor Wallburg never speaks of her, but I know, she was his cousin.”

“Yes, and a beautiful, agreeable person. Because she was educated at the King’s expense and suddenly gave up her career in the midst of her triumph and entered a convent, all the world has talked. She has been dead eight years, as my cousin says.”

“And to-day is the anniversary of her death? Is she buried there in the convent?” asked George.

“Yes, and that is why Frau von Feldau has driven there to-day. She never fails to lay a wreath on her grave.”

George thought of the King. Was he also coming from her grave, as he met him? Then surely had the shy man, the woman-hater once truly loved. How much nearer he seemed to him now than ever before.

“The King is now at Felsenschloss, is he not?” asked George with interest.

The innkeeper nodded. “Yes, he comes here every year at this season. Formerly he loved to live in the Schweizerhaus, which lies higher up in the mountains, but it has become too painful for him, since the death of Herr Director Reinhardt, with whom he there spent many weeks each year. Oh, our gracious Sovereign is full of fine feeling.”

“Do you see the King sometimes?” asked George.

“What a question! But I have heard, how they talk of him in the Capital and say that for days and weeks

he will see no one. All exaggeration, Sir, believe me. Our King is the most condescending gentleman, and has a heart for all. He speaks to everyone about here. Truly he is not like other men, and if he withdraws from the world, whose fault is it, but theirs, who have made the world hateful to him. Yes, Sir, when one sees how he is treated, how he is deceived and led into all kinds of extravagance, on purpose to expose him to ridicule, then one must really pity him and understand, why he withdraws from the world." The landlord spoke with great earnestness.

"Quite true," said George, "but if the King has no true friend, who is to blame for it? Surely, he himself, who so entirely cuts himself off from mankind, pleases himself by living on these lonely heights, where no one dares to venture near him."

The innkeeper shook his head. "That is not so, Sir. His Majesty loves a friend and he has many, to whom he has been deeply attached, and who have attempted to influence his peculiarities; but no sooner has that happened, than intrigues without end were hatched to break off the attachment. You should know this, Sir," and drawing nearer he continued almost in a whisper: "Such a thing is going on now and you will hear more of it in the Forester's lodge. There is Count Adlershorst, His Majesty's adjutant, a splendid, noble man, truly and honorably devoted to the King with his whole heart. As soon as Count Adlerhorst is with the King, he is happy, friendly and has less of his moody hours. But what now? Baron Ebersdorf has built a villa not many miles from here in Gundersbach and is moving in there with his wife, his second wife, — the Italian, we call her — (the first

one was dear and true) and his daughter Paula, the child of his first wife. No one can deny that Fräulein Paula is beautiful, and she may be good, also, if the stepmother has not spoiled her. But this new house of the Baron is the seat of all this hateful gossip about our most gracious Sovereign. There gather all, who wish another government, all who do not like the idealism of the King. In short they arranged that Count Adlershorst should become acquainted with Fräulein Paula, with whom he has fallen in love and will soon marry." The landlord stopped.

"Then what will happen?" asked George.

"What will happen?" was the excited question. "Do you not understand, young man, with this marriage the only sincere friend of the King is won over to the enemy. For Count Goldberg, the King's Master of the Horse, who is supposed to be his trusted friend, and who shares all his confidence, is really not his friend. Of this I have proof, and you will see, it won't be long before Count Adlershorst will be called to a higher post in the Duke's Court and the King will again be left lonely."

"But if the King does not wish it," remarked George doubtfully, "who can force him, to give up the Count?"

"Oh, that will all come about — they know how," replied the landlord, "all work together from the highest official to the lowest servant and even if his true subjects shake their fists, they are the weaker party, and the poor Count will be drawn into the net and will heed no warnings."

"How do you know all that?" asked George still unbelieving.

"Oh, that surprises you, young man," laughed the landlord. "Really how should an innkeeper know these

things? Well, Sir, my sister's son Joseph — Sepp we call him for short — is His Majesty's lackey and Sepp is engaged to my Bärbel. Now you see how I know so much. A landlord hears and sees many things. Neither Count Adlershorst, nor Count Goldberg, nor the tricky Justice von Gleichen disdain to take a cool drink here, and the Italian woman with the beautiful Paula has often stopped at my door."

He rose and stepped toward the window. "I hear a wagon. It must be that of Frau Forstmeister."

Chapter II.

A graceful, cheerful looking woman, greeted most respectfully by the inhabitants of the house, the landlord leading the van, entered the Inn a few minutes later. Two half-grown daughters of eleven and thirteen, accompanied by their governess, followed her. The clear brown eyes of Frau Katharina von Feldau laughed as joyfully as did formerly those of Kathi Wallburg. Happiness beamed from her countenance, the happiness of the wife and mother, who finds her greatest satisfaction in the home. As she learned from the innkeeper, that her husband's new student was here, she invited him in the most charming manner to ride with her to the Hunting Lodge. "Franzel would gladly ride with the coachman". Whereupon George accepted, insisting however upon the boxseat himself. In truth, he preferred to walk, but her friendly offer was not to be declined.

Resi set refreshments before the ladies. Many questions were now asked about Professor Wallburg. George

must tell them, how he was, and Frau von Feldau's eyes grew moist, as she heard of the quiet manner of life and the great respect he enjoyed in the world of science.

George's father, a well known and distinguished philologist had the closest relations with Professor Wallburg, upon whose advice, George, who had always preferred the woods and fields to the desk of a scholar, had taken up the career of a forester and entered himself as a pupil of Herr von Feldau. The only person, who was silent during this conversation, was Emma Waldow, the governess, a young lady of about twenty-four, whose peculiarly earnest face while not beautiful, was attractive by its thoughtful melancholy.

A blond, with delicate features, eyes full of fire and brilliancy, but whose sad expression surprised one at first sight. There was certainly something mysterious about this quiet, modest woman, and this attracted George's attention to her and led him to begin a conversation, to which she contributed most reluctantly. During the drive, in spite of the lively talk of her two pupils, the dark-haired Franziska and the blond Katharina, she mixed in the conversation only when directly addressed by Frau von Feldau.

The hunting lodge, where the Forstmeister lived, was an old building of the eighteenth century, surrounded with the most prodigal charms of nature. A sparkling mountain stream leaped forth from a rocky gorge and curved about the meadows, richly covered with flowers, and on to the cultivated fruit-gardens of the forestry. A broad well-kept road led down through the deep woods to the nearest town, the stately Gundersbach, which in summer was visited by many tourists, and where lovers of nature

had built summer-residences. The entire place was encircled by a range of mountain peaks towering high over each other, some with mighty, snow-capped tops.

George looked about admiringly. It had been his wish from childhood to live in such a mountain world far from the busy town. Here the soul must open to all the good and beautiful, here must one's heart become wide and great. More and more could he understand the King's passion for solitude and this mountain-life.

Yet might the King, the ruler of a land, upon whom the weal and woe of a great people depended, without neglecting his duties give himself up so entirely to his own inclinations? George's sane common-sense must answer this question with a decided No, even though his heart swelled with sympathy for the noble, artistic nature, which, wounded by the battle with rough realities, like a sensitive plant drew back into itself, and unable to realize its ideals in life, sought to picture to itself a self-created fairy world. Oh, who could warn the gifted Monarch, who open his eyes, to see what dangers surrounded him, to meet them, to expose the lies and falsehoods and to show to his people, who loved him, that he was still the strong-willed, self-conscious ruler as before in days of his most hopeful youth! Who, indeed? George looked from one to another of the inhabitants of this house. Certainly if anywhere in the world, here beat true hearts! What a splendid appearance the Chief Forester von Feldau made! His clear eyes and open countenance spoke of the joy of life, of a contented spirit. Near him was the erect figure of Forester Wallburg, who to the surprise of Frau Kathi, had come a few minutes after their arrival from the lake to the Lodge. His visits

of late had become so seldom, that this must mean some thing important. He shook hands with his son-in-law, allowed his grand-children to kiss his hand and stroked tenderly the blond hair of little Erich, the five-year old grandson, who came with joy to meet him. He had heard of George through Romuald and asked much about his absent son. Frau Kathi perceived lines of care upon his otherwise sunny face. At present however there was no time for questions, as the supper stood steaming upon the table.

The conversation turned naturally upon the King, about whose head dark clouds had begun to gather. The royal finances had been embarrassed by the extravagant buildings ordered by the King, and this had led to bitter attacks by hostile newspapers upon the extravagance and peculiarities of the lonely Monarch.

"I cannot understand", said the forester, "why so many reproach the King for his love of building, as if it injured the country. His forefathers had the same architectural taste and they granted them three times as much as they now refuse the King. And does not this building benefit his people? How many find employment and income by it and what a means of promoting art and artisans! Besides, this is the only pleasure the King has and one should certainly allow him this."

A sigh from Herr von Feldau and his wife was the only answer to these expressions. As soon as supper was over the old man withdrew with his son-in-law into his study.

"Now, what brings you here, father," asked the Forstmeister, reaching him the pipe, that he always kept ready

for him, but which this time he declined with troubled expression.

"Is it then so bad?" asked Herr von Feldau astonished.

"Yes, indeed," answered the old man impatiently, drumming upon the table. "A pretty tale, indeed. Something quite unheard of. Nothing less than that there is a conspiracy among his own servants to depose our hereditary Monarch, a miserable lot of rascals, who would sell their master for thirty pieces of silver."

Herr von Feldau listened intently.

"How do you know this, father?"

"Quite simply. One of the scoundrels, the lackey Licht suffered remorse of conscience. He came to Father Berner and with sobs and tears confessed all."

"Are you sure, father, that neither jealousy nor hatred of some preferred fellow-servant has influenced him to this confession?"

"Quite sure. He brought Father Berner a written document, miserable treachery, prepared by one of these dogs and given to Licht to take to the Capital, in which all the doings and sayings of our noble Lord are set forth with the intention of deposing him."

"To what purpose?"

The old forester instead of answering, grasped his head with his hands. "But I believe it not, it is all trickery and lies," groaned the old man.

"You go too far there, father," said Herr von Feldau, "unfortunately, unfortunately, the peculiarities of the King increase from day to day."

The hand of the old man fell heavily upon the table. "I hope, Erich, that you are not one to condemn a man

without knowing the facts. Or does your cousin Ludmilla speak through you? After all the experience you have had, you should have nothing to do with her."

"She is our neighbour, father, and my relation," said Herr von Feldau apologetically. "I keep up a certain acquaintance with her, as appearances demand, nothing more. But, father, you cannot deny, that the King's manner of living leads to much talk."

"Certainly, I do not deny that," said the forester with earnestness. "But tell me, how did he come to have these peculiarities? To have the royal power in his hands so early, is enough to make one lose his head. Then the bitter experience of his betrothal, the trickery, with which they forced our poor Franziska, for whom he had a true, sincere love, to flee from the Capital, to renounce the world, to die; when one thinks of all this, we must pity him, and forgive much, very much."

"I am the last person, father, to throw a stone at the King," said Herr von Feldau, "but other demands are made upon the ruler of a people than upon ordinary mortals. No one could hinder the King from following his inclinations, if he would decide to lay down the crown and retire to private-life."

"Naturally," agreed the old man, "but you are mixing up in the common gossip. We should all pray to God daily, to preserve our King long for the government and welfare of his people, for in spite of all his peculiarities, whenever an important decision has come to him, he has always been in the right. Do you dare deny that?"

"No, no, I recognize the undeniable services, which he has rendered the fatherland, and yet when one earnestly

considers the matter as it now stands, one must admit, that it cannot go much farther."

"It will and must go farther," interrupted the old man excitedly, "as soon as one succeeds in bringing the King to recognize the situation and in leading him to tear forcibly away the veil, which hides him from his people."

"A pious wish, father, which will scarcely be fulfilled. You know, the King is unapproachable."

"For you, for me, that I admit," persisted the forester, "but not for those, who have his confidence, as for example Count Adlershorst."

"Count Adlershorst celebrates his wedding in a few days, and takes a wedding-journey."

"Yet, he is the only one, upon whose support we dare depend, the only reliable soul remaining for the King. For Count Goldberg, the much spoken of, the much envied confidant of his Majesty belongs, as has just been proved, to those, who are double-faced. He does not wish to ruin his chances with either party, and endures what he is not able to hinder. On this account Father Berner, since finding out the fact, has turned his eyes toward Count Adlershorst, and as the priest, poor soul, is confined to the house with the gout, he asked me through your assistance to deliver this letter to the Count personally, begging him to come to his house at once."

"And you trust the Count so entirely," interrupted Herr von Feldau, smilingly taking the letter, "in spite of the fact that he is about to marry the step-daughter of my harshly judged cousin Ludmilla, thereby, as everyone says, cutting off his friendship with the King?"

"Yes, I believe in him," answered the forester firmly, "and Father Berner does too. Count Adlershorst is a

noble man and noble men do not change their opinions as easily as their washing, even if ten intriguing women like your Cousin Ludmilla attempt to move him. Furthermore the Baroness Paula is a young lady, of whom all speak well and no one regrets more than the Count himself, that she has such a numbskull of a father as Baron Ebersdorf and a step-mother like the former Countess Mario. — But to the question, will you deliver the letter or not?’

Herr von Feldau, so forcibly addressed, remained a time most thoughtful, than added reflectively: “In any case, that must be done in a way, to attract no attention; to approach the Count in Felsenschloss appears almost impossible, to send a messenger dangerous.”

“Oh the devil take all your considerations,” muttered the forester. “I tell you the letter must be put into the Count’s hand and that to-day, as every minute is precious on account of this coming wedding. Have I shaken my old bones these two hours in a carriage to go home with nothing done? Something must be done, in one way or another.”

“Something shall be done,” said Herr von Feldau consolingly; “give me a moment to think, how best to do it.” After a short pause he continued: “How does the young Randau please you?”

“The new student? what about him?”

“He spoke to-day at table so warmly of the King. Perhaps he can —”

“What,” interrupted the forester full of displeasure, “a perfect stranger? Would you trust so important a message to him?”

"A stranger he is not, dear father. Your son Romuald has known him from childhood and assures me of the honesty of his character."

"Hm!" answered the old man. "Certainly he would not be a traitor, he looks too honest for that. But although —"

"Listen a moment to me, father. Fräulein Waldow is driving over to Gundersbach this afternoon, to take some gifts for my wife and daughters to the young bride, who was formerly a pupil of hers. Young Randau can accompany her."

"Ah ha!" sneered the old man, "so one dares not trust the letter to the renowned governess! I see through that. Is she not the ward of Justice von Gleichen, one of the greatest adversaries of His Majesty, as well as the right hand of the late Abbé von Eichfeld, and since his death the administrator of Baroness von Ebersdorf's affairs! With great concern did I see this ward of his enter your house, but you would not be warned, and believed the former governess of the young Baroness worthy of all trust. I only hope, that you are right for your sake and the sake of the young daughters, who are devoted to her. But, Erich, why don't you go with her yourself to Gundersbach? That seems the best and the safest, in case you are sure Count Adlershorst is there to-day."

"That I do not doubt, as he is there every day at this time. Unfortunately, I cannot go. Important business calls me at once to the forest."

The forester hemmed and said reluctantly: "Good then, if it cannot be otherwise. Under what pretence

will you give over the companionship of Fräulein Waldow to this stranger?"

"That is easy enough. Herr von Randau is, as I know, a distant relation of Baron Ebersdorf. He may improve this opportunity to introduce himself."

"Immediately on the day of his arrival? that will seem surprising."

"On no account, as he has a holiday, to-day."

"So hurry and send the young man to me," called out the forester impatiently. "I will test him, and if he stands the test, it may be as you suggest, although I had wished something quite different."

Herr von Feldau did not reply to this indirect reproach, but left the room quietly, to send George in at once.

George entered, somewhat astonished; a long conversation followed, which however, must have proved satisfactory, for the young man, as soon as the interview was ended, hurried to the tower-room, assigned to him. Here he found the trunk which had been carefully sent on in advance by his parents and hastily dressed himself for a visit to Baron von Ebersdorf.

Chapter III.

In the luxuriously furnished boudoir of her modern Villa sat Baroness von Ebersdorf in earnest conversation with her friend and counsellor, Justice von Gleichen. Although in the forties, she was still a beautiful woman, though passion had left deep lines in her countenance. Justice von Gleichen, a small, slender man, with clever

face, sharp spectacled eyes and a trace of hardness and strong will about his tightly closed lips was, so to speak, a legacy to Ludmilla from the late Abbé von Eichfeld. The Abbé had, during his life-time, been able to restore the somewhat injured reputation of his beloved ward, the beautiful Countess Mario, whose free life for many years at Nice had led to various rumours. He had succeeded in arranging a marriage for her with the widower, Baron von Ebersdorf, at that time Chamberlain of the Court of Prince Henry, thus assuring her a certain position in the circles of German society. Although Ludmilla was born in Italy, and her father was an Italian, yet she was devoted to Germany. Her dearest wish, since she had been obliged to leave the Capital, was to return there and to live near him, who had caused her the bitterest pain, the pain of unanswered love; and either to bring this love to a conquest or, were that impossible, to take vengeance for her humiliation, her ruined life on him, whom she blamed for all that she had become, an unhappy, restless soul, whose only heritage from the past was the disdain and scorn of herself.

Yes, to take revenge, to see him fall from the heights, him, the proud and pure one; to help on his fall, to show him that she, whose name he had blotted out of his remembrance, whom he had left to crawl in the dust like a worm, she possessed the power to destroy him! — That was the only thought, which gave to the monotony of her days a charm, the balsam, which alone served to allay the pain of her bleeding heart. So she had won Herr von Gleichen, the fine, polished Justice, the clever deputy, to be her devoted friend, he, the tricky man, she, the beautiful, much admired woman, who still stood high in favour with Prince Henry. The Justice was more

ready than even she realized to carry out her purpose. Already their goal seemed nearer — the circle of friends of the recluse on the throne was becoming smaller, the number of his opponents greater; still he possessed an adjutant in Count Adlershorst, who remained true and whose influence must be feared, as he used this influence to try to overcome the misanthropy of the King, and to persuade him to return permanently to the Capital.

The King had, ever since the stormy days in which his beloved one and his true friend had been turned from him, remained in the Capital only for the time prescribed by the Constitution and then had lived in such seclusion, that the good citizens had occasion to be angry, as he openly avoided meeting them.

A return of the once much beloved Monarch to the City did not correspond to the wishes of his adversaries, and consequently the Justice regarded it as a great success for their cause, that Count Adlershorst, by a rare chance, had entered the house of Baron von Ebersdorf, and would soon be connected with it.

Count Adlershorst had become acquainted with the young Baroness Ebersdorf at a soirée at Prince Henry's palace. She was a beauty and her charms of mind had made the deepest impression upon him. The Count had at first resisted the inclination to love the young woman, as he well knew the unfriendly attitude of her family to the King. But the heart of the young rosebud responded to the advances of the Count so warmly, that soon his feeling conquered all discretion. In the meantime the King himself advised the marriage. The time when his intercourse with Ludmilla had taken place, was so distant, that it hardly seemed possible, that her jealousy could

interfere with the happiness of his friend. So the betrothal had been celebrated, the wedding-day was near. Count Adlershorst, the adjutant of His Majesty, was a daily guest of the family Ebersdorf and divided his time between them and the King, who for several months had resided in the Felsenschloss.

However the approaching marriage had not accomplished what was desired by the enemies of the King. It was meant to be a wedge between the friendship of the King and his adjutant, and so far, there was no trace of this to be seen.

"I must confess, dear Herr von Gleichen", acknowledged Ludmilla to him privately, "that Count Adlershorst is much more obstinate in his opinion, than I had supposed, and so far Paula is but wax in his hands. Moreover he is such a contrary nature, that he resists any influence on my part."

"You should not have dismissed Emma Waldow so soon after the engagement, Baroness," answered the Justice somewhat displeased, "she always had an influence over the young Baroness, and I should have turned it to our account. I had taken care to be sure of that."

"I could not expect her to give up so good an engagement as that with my cousin Feldau, to remain a few months more with Paula. Besides Paula wished that she should accept it and you too, Justice, were quite willing, because you found it desirable that she should be in the household of this family, who are known to be so friendly to the King."

"Yes, indeed. I thought the Count would be less unyielding than he appears to be. In any case we shall soon be free from his presence, for some time at least,

as you inform me, he has asked for several months furlough for his wedding-journey and has obtained it."

She nodded. "Yes, the young pair go to Italy and the King himself has urged the Count not to make the time for this trip too short."

The Justice laughed lightly. "That proves the old proverb: 'Whom the Gods will destroy, they first smite with blindness'. Who knows what may take place here, before the Count returns. We, at least, shall know how to improve his absence. But now in regard to another matter. Was the lackey Licht here to-day? And what had he new to tell from the Fairy Castle?"

"Nothing of importance. Always the same strange fancies, following quickly one after the other, like the pictures of a kaleidoscope. A night ride now here, now there, then absorption in work, plans and designs until morning comes."

"Have you remarked anything striking in Licht?" asked the Justice, bending toward her. "Someone has warned me in regard to him."

"Certainly he was pale and nervous when he was here lately."

"If he should be a traitor!" broke in the Justice with troubled countenance; "that would put us back months! I have written to Emma Waldow, that she should seek to find out particulars and if possible inform me to-night."

"She, herself?"

"If she can bring it about, yes, I do not think much of letters, there lies the danger of exposure."

The wheels of an approaching carriage were heard, and the Justice stepped to the window.

"Are you expecting visitors?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then it is Emma, but she is not alone. A young man sits by her. Who can it be?"

Ludmilla arose and joined him at the window.

"I do not know," said she, "perhaps it is the new forestry student, Herr von Randau, a distant relation of my husband, who is improving this opportunity to make our acquaintance."

"Who sent him to the Forstmeister? Do you know that?"

"I believe Professor Wallburg."

"Wallburg, Wallburg — is he not the son of the old forester Wallburg?"

"Certainly."

"Hm! — That is worth thinking over. I just heard, as I past the convent, that a royal visitor had been there. It was the anniversary of the death of Sister Euphemia, and His Majesty never neglects to hear mass on this day, and with his own hand to lay a wreath on her tomb. The forester's wife and children have also been there."

Ludmilla's head sank and she bit her lips in pain. So the King had not forgotten her once so envied rival, in spite of the fact, that he was now supposed to be a woman-hater.

"You have nothing to fear from Professor Wallburg," said she after a little. "He loved Sternau and had every ground for hating the King."

"Yet he is regarded as one of his most important followers. Singular, just as singular as the devotion of the old forester and the Feldau family, who according to my view, have as little reason as he for admiring the King. But let us go into the salon."

In the salon Baroness Paula was seated before a silver tray pouring coffee into dainty cups of Sevres porcelain. Thus engaged she looked uncommonly sweet, a delicate, blond, fairy-like person with soulful blue eyes. Gazing at her tenderly sat her lover near her father, Baron von Ebersdorf, a pale, weak-looking, gray-haired gentleman with somewhat bent figure. As Ludmilla entered, Count Adlershorst arose and kissed her hand. Adlershorst was a tall, handsome man, with strong, earnest countenance. As the servant announced Fräulein Waldow and Herr von Randau, Paula hurried to greet her former governess. The basket containing the wedding-presents from the Feldau family was placed by the servant in the next room, where a goodly array of other gifts were arranged.

As Paula followed the servant, George with perfect address presented himself to the Baron and Baroness von Ebersdorf.

"Randau?" answered a horse voice from the sofa, and the Baron placed his monocle aright and gazed at the approaching student. "The Randau's of Grünhagen or Rheinfelden?"

"Grünhagen," answered George quickly. "I have the honour to be related to you through my grandmother, a Baroness von Ebersdorff."

"Ah! ah! The literary branch of the family! Less noble, I take it, to exchange the sword for the school-master's ruler, as your father chose to do. The spirit of the time, however. And you?"

"I wish to be a forester and have just come as student to Herr von Feldau."

Again the Baron, as was his habit, passed his hand nervously over his bald head muttering something of

recreant nobility or of misalliances, but Ludmilla interrupted him with pleasant words and invited their guests to be seated.

It was long before George found an opportunity to deliver his message to the Count, unheard even by Fräulein Waldow. Forester Wallburg had imposed upon him the strictest silence in the presence of his companion, but without this warning he would scarcely have become confidential with this young woman, who had hardly exchanged a word with him the entire way, and who apparently wished to avoid any serious conversation. Now the Baroness had gone to the adjoining room, called by Paula, who wished her to see the new presents; the Justice was engaged in conversation about Court affairs with the Baron, so George could, without attracting attention, step near to Count Adlershorst, who was engaged in looking at a book of engravings, and whisper: "In the interests of His Majesty, I beg a word alone with you." Surprised and alarmed the Count turned to him. But quickly controlling himself he gave him only a glance, and with composure continued the contemplation of the art book. In spite of this composure the episode did not escape the eye of the watchful Justice, although he had not understood, what George had said. Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, he rose and approached the two gentlemen asking the Count in a tone of deep sympathy after the health of His Majesty.

Unfortunately reports were current in the Capital of an increasing nervous condition of the Monarch, which had indeed led him to abuse his body-servant. It was very important for him to hear from an eye-witness the

truth of this report, or, as he hoped, the exaggeration of the occurrence.

The Count quietly listened to the words of the well-known enemy of the King, then calmly replied: "Certainly it is exaggeration, Herr von Gleichen, to which the newspapers have unfortunately given circulation. The entire story which has gathered so much by repeating, is simply this, that His Majesty surprised a thieving rascal among his lackeys in the act of conveying a valuable etui from His Majesty's writing desk to his own pocket, and in his rage, the Monarch took him by the collar and threw him out of the door. The rascal fell and struck his head against the sharp edge of a table in the ante-chamber, and is still in bed with his bruises."

The Justice nodded with a friendly smile, but his manner showed plainly, that he accepted this version of the matter only out of politeness.

"I rejoice to hear from so authentic a source this reassuring information," answered he. "You know, Count, how people love to exaggerate, and how seriously they speak of the increase of his nervous attacks, which would make one fear the worst for His Majesty."

The hypocritical air of the man made the Count impatient. "This concern is quite unnecessary," answered he emphatically. "If the nerves of His Majesty are more excitable than those of other men, the reason is not hard to find. No one in the country is less protected than our King, and no one has such deep and tender sensibilities as he."

Again the Justice nodded with the same polite, incredulous smile as before. Count Adlershorst scowled and breaking off the conversation turned to George and

invited him, to take a walk with him in the garden, from which there were so many beautiful views. George understood at once and followed the Count, who walked silently through an avenue of beeches to a terrace over a rocky plateau, at the front of which a mountain stream rushed over green moss-covered stones to the valley below. The view was grand, but neither of the men regarded it. George had given the letter confided to him to the Count, who now read it carefully. His countenance seemed unusually serious and anxious.

"You are indeed a stranger to me", said he to George, "but your eye tells me, you are true. Can you personally take my answer to Forester Wallburg to-day?"

"Herr Wallburg begged me to do so."

"Good, then tell him, that I will see Father Berner to-day before I return to the Castle. Now let us return. No one must guess, what has brought you here. There are, unfortunately, too many spies hereabouts."

They turned to go back, but before they reached the shady avenue, the Count paused.

"Permit me to thank you, Herr von Randau. I see that our good cause has gained a new friend."

"It is so little that I have done," answered George modestly, "that it is not worth thanks. But I hope, that other opportunities may be given me of better proving my loyalty to the good cause."

He emphasized the expression "good cause", and the Count nodded cordially. "Your offer will perhaps only too soon be considered. The probability is that at no distant time all the true subjects of our King will be called upon to protect his sacred person."

"Use me as you will, Count Adlershorst, my life belongs to my King." He spoke so warmly, with the enthusiasm of youth, that it moved the Count agreeably. Again he pressed the young man's hand. "We shall meet again, Herr von Randau. Nothing more for to-day."

Chapter IV.

Everywhere quiet. A clear sky like that of Autumn sent its starry light beaming over Felsenschloss and its lake, embedded in the mountains. The lately finished music-room, its walls decorated with costly frescoes representing old German Sagas, was brilliantly lighted. In a room adjoining the stage sat the Prima donna of the Royal Opera, leaning back in a gold embroidered chair. Her costly costume is put on for an arie of Reinhardt's world renowned opera, which she has been commanded to sing here. It is the same opera, in which once Sternau had enchanted all hearts, she, who like a meteor had arisen suddenly in the musical heavens and again as suddenly disappeared. Near the singer at the piano stood Herr Albert, the Director of the Royal-Opera, looking over sheets of music. The artist suppressed a yawn. "How long will it be, before we shall be released, Herr Albert?" asked she.

He shrugged his shoulders. "How do I know? Certainly not before midnight."

"Then," said the artist, "come sit by me and talk to me, or I shall really fall asleep, and then I should be good for nothing. The long railway journey has used up my voice."

"As you wish, Frau Eva," answered he smiling. "Now let us talk."

"Tell me once more something of the lost Reinhardt. Were you not one of his pupils?"

"Yes, indeed, I am proud to say so."

"And were you not at the first performance of this favorite opera of the King in the city?"

"Certainly, Frau Eva."

"But, Heavens, can't you get out of this commonplace mood? It is enough to drive one mad — but it is a crime to speak of madness here, I suppose. You too are one of the opponents of the old school, which Reinhardt called the hand-organ music of Mozart, are you not?"

Herr Albert laughed. "You are extremely piquant to-day, Frau Eva. What a shame, that Count Goldberg is not present. He would soon be lying at your feet, lost in admiration."

"Hush," cried she, lightly touching his lips with her fan." No triviality in these rooms consecrated to the culture of ideal beauty. Rather answer my question. Were you present at the premiere?"

"Certainly, but only as an unknown person. I played second violin in the orchestra."

"But you have seen Sternau, have heard her sing. Was she really as enchanting as they say, and did His Majesty really —"

"Hush! Hush!" whispered the Kapellmeister, and laid a warning finger on his lips.

"Did she live here in these rooms?" asked the lady, disregarding the warning with an uncommonly charming, coquettish toss of her head.

"What a question, dear lady. This castle was not yet built."

"Well, where then was this tragic comedy of the King's love affair played out?"

"In the Seeschloss, as far as I know. Sternau was the daughter of the castellan."

"Ah! a little goose from the country! Now I understand —"

"What, Frau Eva, if I dare ask!"

"That she entered a convent and her beloved King became Sir Toggenburg. She died near here in the convent, did she not?"

"Surely Frau Eva would have behaved quite differently."

"Certainly, out of this love-sick royal youth I should have made a sensible man, even if he had been so desperately in love as they say."

"Who says that?"

"It is said here and there. Names do not matter. If he really loved her so devotedly, her foolishness is much to blame for his destruction."

"Presumptuous woman. Hold your tongue. You are speaking of our Monarch. Have respect for Majesty."

"How can I have respect for a King, who bids me sing at the midnight-hour in an empty room, while he sits invisible behind a gilded screen in his loggia?"

"And yet — as I have heard, Frau Eva loves the midnight-hour extremely, and is one of the gayest in the gay circle, which the Baroness von Ebersdorf, the friend of our jolly Prince Henry, is accustomed to gather around her at this hour in winter nights!"

"A night in good company with lively conversation, with music and clinking of glasses, as the old song says, that I enjoy. But here alone, weighed down by the magnificence of these rooms, which only a few privileged eyes have ever seen, that is dismal, that makes me ill-tempered."

"You are singing for the first time for His Majesty, are you not?"

"Yes, for the first time. I believe, Count Goldberg is the means of my being called here and now the traitor leaves me alone in this enchanted castle."

"He is probably hindered by business. But thank you for the compliment. I see, I don't count with the lady — with me she is alone."

Frau Eva laughed merrily. "But, Kapellmeister, you, I see every day. You belong to me."

"And what one owns, one regards not. *Très-bien, ma belle*, we shall remember that."

She neared him and looked at him appealingly. "You don't mind, surely. No, no, you cannot be serious. Set it all down to the effect of this magic castle, in which we are. Ah, if only the magician would come, who would release us, or could I turn back the dial so many years, and really, as the living Sternau, sing something to the King." And becoming thoughtful, she added: "It must have had a peculiar charm to have been loved by the King, when he was young and beautiful and not so strange as now."

"You almost envy the dead?"

"Why not? She had an experience, which no other of us has had. To be the only love of a man — and that man a King! Where else has that occurred? Only in

novels and if I am right, she paid none too dearly for her happiness by renouncing the world, and by death."

"Strange woman! First you scorn the Monarch, and then you really long for the privilege of being loved by him."

"And every year at this day, you say, he has the same arie sung to him?" asked she, disregarding the interruption.

"Every year. It is, I believe the death-day of Sternau and a sort of memorial-service."

"But a service which he arranges in order to live again in the past, the happy past", continued she in the same thoughtful tone. "Do you know, dear Master, that is a thought, which has something suggestive, something encouraging in it, and can lift me above myself. That I shall sing before an unseen listener!"

"Bravo! bravo! Now you please me," cried the Kapellmeister. "Now a glass of champagne and all will go splendidly." He pressed the bell, to order wine. —

Meanwhile the King was in his study, a high, magnificently furnished room. Costly paintings of modern masters adorned the walls, which were covered with gold threaded, silk hangings, the broad windows hung with richly embroidered lamberquins.

In a great arm-chair, bearing the golden crown above its back, sat the King before his writing-desk, upon which a lamp with crystal standard shed a bright, but subdued light. Spread out before him lay faded sheets, which he seemed to have read. His hand, which rested wearily on the table, held a medaillon, with the picture of a delicate blond girl, upon which his half-closed eyes rested as if in a dream. Sometimes his lips moved lightly, and a

sigh escaped them. A sound of longing, of love — a name, called out into the empty air with plaintive desire. For hours he had been here and the strictest command had kept every voice, every sound of the world from the man sunk in reminiscence. Now, he perceived a light knock on the door. It was the signal, which he had given his servant Lippert, with which to announce the hour, when the musical performance should begin. The King arose and quickly passed his hand over his brow and eyes, as if he would drive away the picture, which hovered about him. As he stood, one hand resting on the table, the other covering his eyes, he appeared a man of strength, not the youth with curling hair, whose beauty had once captivated all hearts, but a man in the full strength of his prime. The waving hair closely cut, the countenance still remarkably beautiful, but bearing unmistakable signs of the deepest mental suffering. Over the large, once beaming blue eyes lay a veil, and the brows drew darkly together. Yet as his eyes turned again to the miniature, how they lighted up! For a moment they seemed full of beautiful fire and tenderness. Mechanically, as in a dream, he put the golden chain over his head and the picture into his bosom.

“Farewell, thou, my only, my eternal love,” breathed he softly. Then he rose, and in spite of the simple citizen’s dress, every movement spoke the king. His hand pressed lightly a silver bell, whose tone echoed through the silent castle. Slowly, as by magic, the heavy silken portieres over the folding doors drew back and the doors noiselessly opened. The King stepped into a balcony, supported on pillars of porphyry, a curtain of

crimson velvet embroidered with gold hid the chair, on which he sat. From here he could overlook the brilliantly lighted hall, without himself being seen from the somewhat elevated podium. Now resounded through the immense empty room the perfectly rendered overture of Reinhardt's opera, and a woman's powerful voice sung with consummate art the passionate love arie, which from Francisca's lips had moved him to enchantment. The King listened with closed eyes, leaning back in his chair. The present sank before him, he lived in the past, the blessed past. For him it was not the Prima-donna of his opera, who sang the sweet song of love in so magic a manner, but his resurrected beloved, who had bestowed upon him the highest, the only happiness of his life. As the human voice died away in light soft melody, the violins and wind instruments began simultaneously, creating a sea of tones, which surged through the room, awaking violent longing. Then a crescendo reaching a mighty harmony, a powerful convulsive finale, and the concert was ended. But still the King did not move. He remained sunk in thoughts, his arms resting upon the balustrade, his head buried in his hands. Past happiness, past suffering rushed through his soul. A happiness all too short, a sorrow long, bitter, unspeakable.

He suddenly sprang up and looked about bewildered. He had heard steps. Who dared to disturb him in this sacred moment, devoted to introspection? A word of anger escaped his lips. Trembling before the King's warning attitude, the faithful servant Lippert stuttered forth the words: "Your Majesty commanded."

The King stared angrily at the servant standing before him, but gradually his countenance

relaxed, his soul returned to reality from the region of its far wandering.

"Good, good, Lippert," said he rapidly. "You will find everything ready on my writing desk. Express my satisfaction to the artists, especially to the singer."

Hereupon he turned his back to his servant and gazed with uncovered eyes into the vast, empty hall.

So soon all over, even the memory, only an intoxicating moment, which life with its grim realities had instantly stepped in to destroy. And yet, he himself had commanded the lackey to come immediately after the close of the concert to him in order to convey to the singer the royal gift, designed to express his thanks for her performance. As the King turned again toward his room, he saw Lippert still standing in the door.

"What is it, Lippert?" asked he frowning.

"Your Majesty ordered supper for two in the small hall."

The King then remembered.

"Is Count Adlershorst already here?" asked he quickly.

"He has been here an hour, Your Majesty."

"Good, I will come at once."

The servant withdrew. A few minutes later he stepped into the room of the singer, who had already changed her costume in order to take the waiting royal carriage for the night drive to the railway-station.

The royal gift although not unexpected, moved her most agreeably, still more the words of appreciation of her performance from His Majesty. A smile of satisfaction passed over her face. She opened the case and

saw with beaming eyes a costly bracelet, set with sparkling jewels.

"I thank you," said she to the servant, taking a gold piece from her portemonnaie, to press into his hand. The latter bowed and modestly refused it.

"His Majesty has forbidden us to receive gifts."

The singer, surprised, still held out the money. "Then what can I do for you?"

With some embarrassment he reached her a paper saying: "Dare I ask the gracious lady to write her name here?"

"My name, why that?"

"It is only an acknowledgement of the jewelry."

"Ah so!" said the artist and wrote her name.

A few minutes later in the carriage with Director Albert, she could not forbear expressing her astonishment at this affair.

"This poetical King is also practical," mused she. "I must confess that the gift, which gave me such joy as an expression of royal recognition, has lost somewhat of its value on this account. This prepared acknowledgement brings the matter down to an ordinary sort of payment."

"But, dear Madame," interrupted the Director, "you do not consider, that there is no other guarantee for the King, that you really have received the gift, except your signature. His Majesty has had unpleasant experiences."

Most astonished, Frau Eva shook her head. "Oh heavens," cried she, "if one considers everything, the lot of a King is really not to be envied. And still we wonder, when our sovereigns become misanthropes and like our poor King, shun mankind."

"You are right, Frau Eva," nodded he. "And I shall rejoice if this excursion to Felsenschloss leads you to a milder judgment of the King, and that you should be able to pass this judgment on to the circle in which you move, where they say, the Monarch is so mercilessly condemned."

"Yes, if I could do that," sighed the singer. "But what can I, a little insignificant light in that illustrious circle of highborn, distinguished gentlemen, who feel themselves deposed, neglected, overlooked! Unfortunately, I can do nothing."

"You must not think that. Let each one do his best. And with one stone fitted into another, at last a bulwark will be produced, which will protect and cover the one attacked."

"Let us hope so," said he and leaning back in the carriage she gave herself over to her reflections.

Chapter V.

In a grove of palms, ferns and laurels a fountain plays softly. Water lilies rest as if dreaming on the silvery water of the basin, tall rose trees fill the air with a sweet perfume. An artificial moon sheds its beam upon this tropical scene and lightens the terrace, modelled in the form of a gigantic shell. A well-spread table resting upon coral feet is lighted by two candelabras, held aloft in the hands of sculptured nymphs. Here the King is taking supper with Count Adlershorst.

At the end of each course the table sinks down and rises again, garnished by invisible hands with new dishes.

Here, far from any listeners, the parting friends can intimately exchange their thoughts. For the King regards his adjutant as his dearest friend, who has come to take his farewell before his wedding-trip to Italy, for which the King has granted him several months. The Monarch fully awakened from the dreamy state, which had formerly withdrawn him from reality, overflows with the charming amiability, his special gift, which makes him irresistible even to his enemies, as long as they are in his presence. He is sad at heart, but seeing anxiety in the eye of his friend, who is approaching the happiest day of his life, and conscious that this anxiety is on his account, he seeks to appear joyful and gay.

But this does not answer Count Adlershorst wishes. He has something serious and important on his mind, and he waits patiently for the moment, when he can speak of it without wounding the sensitive friend. For what he has to say is no light consideration respecting majesty, but it is a word, a warning to the prince, to the man himself, to seize the sword which others now bear for him, to show his enemies and the world with a powerful hand, that he is no more the dreamer, but the sovereign, who knows what he wishes, and who is determined, when the time comes, to give expression to his royal will.

Count Adlershorst has driven immediately from the Ebersdorf Villa in Giundersbach to Father Berner, as he directed George to announce. The reverend man, bowed with age, has disclosed to him with tears in his eyes the whole treacherous plot, by which they had begun to entangle the Monarch for his ruin. Now the Count knows the names of those, who deceive the King with pretended devotion, but who use his confidence as a weapon against him; he

also knows the role which the step-mother of his fiancée plays in this tragedy with her friend, the Justice von Gleichen. At this idea his heart swells with indignation. Thank God that the hour is near, which will for ever unite him with his Paula and lead her and him away from the realm of the Ebersdorf-house. He has hired for the winter months a villa somewhat secluded, on the Riviera, in the vicinity of Bordighera, where he might quietly live with his young bride. And now over this sunny future a shadow is thrown on account of the anxiety for his King, whom he knows, since his interview with the old priest, to be surrounded by dangers. This makes him earnest and thoughtful and permits him to follow only half-heartedly the brilliant conversation of the King. The Monarch speaks of new plans for the decoration of his castles, of the building of a new Moorish palace after the pattern of the Alhambra, which shall arise on that mountain peak looking over to them in the pale distance.

"So in the presence of the snow-covered firs to call magically forth the South," he cried out with sparkling eyes, "to wander through pillared courts, near splashing fountains, among blooming oleanders and pomegranates, while the blizzard outside rages over the world, is that not poetry?"

The Count smiled bitterly.

"It is a dream, Your Majesty, a beautiful dream."

"Which you think under the conditions of to-day, has little chance of realization", said the King in a sombre tone.

"If I may speak frankly, Your Majesty, none."

The King leaned back in his chair, his face darkened.

"You are right, I am a fool to hope for the fulfilment of such a wish, and yet, you know, Adlershorst, I have no other joy in life, and it would be hard to renounce this, my last one."

The features of the Count showed an inward struggle.

"Your Majesty," he answered earnestly, "as hard as it is for me, I must say it for the welfare of your sacred head, Your Majesty must renounce these tempting plans and more than this; Your Majesty knows the admonishing word of our greatest poet: 'Who gives himself to loneliness, ah! he is soon alone.' But a King dares not be alone; he needs friends, and Your Majesty needs them far more than others!"

The King's eye glistened.

"I understand you, Adlershorst, understand you only too well. Something lies upon your heart. But I did not wish to touch it. This anxiety about me shall not destroy the first joy of your married life. But after all —"

"Sire," called out the Count and bent over the King's hand in deep emotion, "I comprehend my gracious Master's kindness and yet I cannot be silent. Ah, if I were able to turn away the danger from the sacred head of my King without his knowing the danger! But no one can do that, no one, even if he gave his life, but Your Majesty himself. In your exalted hand alone lies your fate and that of the Fatherland."

At this the King became very serious.

"What it is, dear Count, that so moves you. Do speak, I am ready for any thing. What mischief is plotted against me? What do you ask, that I should do in my defence?"

"The mischief, Your Majesty, is the same old one and yet always new. Your Majesty is surrounded by spies, traitors."

The King quickly laid his hand on the Count's arm.

"Speak no names, Adlershorst, I beg you. If I should to-day clean my whole Court from those impure elements, who would assure me, that in their place greater rascals would not come? Yes, if I had the power to make thinking, feeling men out of the cheap, pitiable crowd! But here even the King's power stops. By heavens! I am thoroughly tired of the miserable comedy around me. It would have been a work of friendship for your King, if you could have saved me this excitement. — To help, to correct — that I have long since given up. The day of light has not yet dawned.

"Perhaps I came too late to the world, too late to carry out the ideas, which dwell in my heart — and which I might have been able to realize, if to-day kings had the power which they held two centuries ago, when Louis le Grand could speak the proud word: *L'état c'est moi!* To make my nation great and happy, to grant it all the gifts, that are necessary for its prosperity, to call forth the flower of art, to promote, to protect all which is good, beautiful and great, that would have been the fulfilment of a dream embracing all that was desirable in life. But so to stand with my hands tied, a rock in the midst of a sea of fighting parties full of envy and hate, overwhelmed by the high waves of passion, and nothing left to me but the power to veto the most extreme measures! — What can I do but save myself in solitude, to avoid being dragged down into this whirlpool of hell? They reproach me for my solitude, for my inclinations, and yet, if a gracious

God had not given me the power to escape from this sad, hopeless, joyless reality into the kingdom of beauty, poetry and art, — then, by heavens! I should not be alive to-day. Oh Adlershorst, when I consider what I have lived through and suffered, how much treachery, infamy I have looked upon, what I have experienced myself, what I have had and — lost, lost!”

His head sank into his hand and a sob forced itself from his breast.

Count Adlershorst listened with respectful silence and the deepest compassion, love and sympathy swelled his breast.

“Here,” the King continued, losing himself again in memories, “at this very place I sat with him, a few years ago, for the last time, that noble, dear friend, that gentle great, artist, my Reinhardt. They drove him away from me. Only quietly and secretly did I dare to see him and enjoy with him a few short hours of happiness. But how beautiful were these hours up there in the simple Schweizerhaus. There I did not need kingly pomp and splendour, there I had him, the lofty spirit, who lifted me out of the desert dust of earth to those pure regions in which he himself lived. Only the farewell banquet could be here, surrounded by all the splendour, which his artistic soul loved. Here at this place it was, that I lifted my glass in farewell greeting. ‘I drink to a new and splendid creation,’ cried I, ‘and may your Genius light up the German nation for many a happy year as it does to-day!’ With a joyful, happy face he touched my glass. But as the glasses met, a harsh tone went through the room and his glass lay broken on the floor! ‘I am not superstitious,’ said he, more for my comfort than his own, ‘but if it

should be, that I should suddenly be called away from the light of day, mourn not on my account. I have reached my life's goal and rest from my labours.' In the next year the Schweizerhaus was deserted. A sudden, painless death, beautiful as his life, had taken him. He rests from his labours. Oh to be so fortunate, to be granted a like painless death!"

"Your Majesty, it is life, not death, that calls you!" Count Adlershorst interrupted. "It means a fight, a hard fight perhaps. But Your Majesty will conquer, and come out with new strength and new love of life."

The King shook his head. "You are mistaken, Adlershorst. I am no more disposed to fight, my strength is broken. I have become weary, weary to death."

"Your Majesty, I implore you, not this despondency. For the sake of your friends, who love you and who look up hopefully to their King."

"Exactly on account of my friends I must withdraw from the fight, or I shall drag them with me into ruin."

"Not, if your Majesty steps out decidedly on their side. Your Majesty need not be so despondent. In spite of all that seems to contradict it, the nation loves its King, and millions long for the moment when he will live again in their midst, and seize with a vigorous hand the reins of government."

"And yet the deputies of the people have only lately voted against the fulfilment of my wish, of my request!"

He struck his hand heavily on the table and in his eyes glistened a dark, unearthly look, before which the Count shuddered. But the King immediately controlled himself.

"Let us not talk of it, dear friend. Too many sleepless nights, too many bitter hours has this shameful affair given me!"

"Your Majesty loses courage too soon! All may turn out for the best," said the Count striving to encourage the King, who with bowed head was staring into vacancy. "If your Majesty would decide to take up your residence in the Capital, not only for a few weeks, but for the winter season at least!"

Again the King's hand dropped so heavily on the table, that the glasses clinked.

"What do you demand of me, Count?" he ejaculated passionately. "This is impossible! What they have done to me there —?"

Count Adlershorst looked down in confusion.

"Your Majesty should try to forget the past, — should forgive."

"Do I bear malice, Adlershorst? But can you blame me, if I abhor the town, where I have experienced such horrors?"

"And yet," began the Count seriously, "Your Majesty must overcome even these well justified feelings. For it concerns the highest, even your throne, Your Majesty!"

With great staring eyes the King looked speechless for a moment at the man bold enough to dare to utter what none other in his vicinity would have dared.

"My throne," repeated he at last and his lips quivered, "so you too, Adlershorst, you fear the unspeakable, you too believe in a plot of high treason?"

"I not only fear, I know."

A deadly pallor covered for a moment the King's face.

"So it is true, what gloomy dreams have painted before me in the dark nights? An uncontrollable fate full of horror approaches me!"

He stretched out his hand defensively before him, a shadow passed over his eyes and a tremor ran through his frame.

"Your Majesty can, and will conquer fate", sounded hopefully the voice of the Count in his ear.

The King shook his head.

"No, Fate will conquer me."

"Only an effort", begged the Count, not yet discouraged. "I stake my life, as soon as Your Majesty shall decide personally to lead your own cause in the Parliament and to show yourself to the population of your capital with your former kindness, all the dark plots of your enemies will dissolve into nothing."

The King's eye sought that of the Count in anxious question. A deep sigh escaped his breast.

"One should not disdain the advice of a friend. Therefore, though I myself do not expect much from it,—because you wish it, dear Count, I yield. But only with you! Your friendship, your true eyes are necessary to me in that Babel, whose restless, shallow life I abhor."

"That is a promise, Your Majesty," cried the Count joyfully. "Oh now, now I hope for the best. And one more respectful request. May Your Majesty have the grace to change the six months furlough which you have kindly granted me, to three. I shall then be back in season, to accompany Your Majesty to the Capital."

The King looked at the Count greatly moved.

"Why, my dear Count, you will cut off the little honeymoon with your loved wife, to which you have looked

forward so joyfully, for my sake, for the sake of your King? And yet they told me, that Count Adlershorst, once in the hands of my enemies would wish to change the furlough to dismissal."

The Count blushed quickly.

"Who, who dares say that?"

The King lifted his hand refusingly and said:

"You know, I mention no names."

"And Your Majesty believed it?"

"I believed," the King interrupted him with a ringing voice, "that Count Adlershorst is the noblest, truest human soul I possess and that he, even in the arms of love, will not forget the King, who has no friend but him. No one," he continued with sharp emphasis — "understands me well. Some of my old faithful servants I may except."

"So Your Majesty must protect himself doubly against falseness and send away the faithless ones."

"No, no," the King declined. "I do not like changes, you know it, and I have learned to look treachery in the eye. Let all be as it is, and when you come back, keep your eyes on the traitors. And now, my friend, as you have so thoroughly ruined for us both this last evening, let us part. Once more I drink to your happiness. Your King's love, your King's blessing will go with you all the way."

A few minutes later, deep darkness enveloped the beautiful fairy world of the royal winter-garden in Felsenschloss, but for a long time the King walked restlessly up and down in his apartment. Then again a bell sounded through the castle, horses were led out and harnessed

to a carriage, and the King, wrapped in his long cloak, with his broad-brimmed hat drawn closely over his face, drove forth into the night over the mountains.

Chapter VI.

Prince and Princess Henry were giving a ^{new} ^{year} ball of the new year. The beautiful rooms of their palace shone in festive splendour, proud cavaliers and beautiful ladies thronged in and out of the halls, in one of which a lively dance was going on. It was difficult for the eye to find its way among this continual glittering of brilliant costumes and flashing jewels. Nevertheless, Prince Henry, in appearance still young and elegant, though his hair was much streaked with grey and his handsome, regular features had grown somewhat flabby, at once noticed the charming appearance of young Countess Paula, Count Adiershorst's wife, who with happy smiling face just then floated through the hall on the arm of her partner.

"By God, the woman is beautiful," said he, turning with a knowing wink to the man standing near him, dressed in the becoming uniform of a chamberlain. "This Adlershorst does not really deserve such happiness, as the friend of my royal Cousin, the despiser of women. What a magic charm of innocence — before it, Count Goldberg, even your friend, the beautiful Frau Eva, vanishes. By the way, how is she? 'Tis a long time since I have seen her in this familiar circle."

The man addressed, replied with a bitter look: "Ah woman, woman, Your Highness! One is never sure of her! Even our bright friend is no more the same, since

she sang before His Majesty at Felsenschloss. In spite of the fact that she has not seen the royal person, she feels all at once a deep interest in him, is loud in praise and approval of his extremely fine nobility, of his insight into art, in short she has gone over to the camp of the King's

The returned the prince, "that is only natural. ~~Due~~ as Goethe says: 'Doch wem gar nichts daran scheint, ob er reizt, ob er rührt, der bezaubert, der verführt! Anyway, friend, they are platonic successes, which we gladly grant His Majesty.'"

With that the prince nodded graciously to the Count and walked to another group. He did not however remain here long, but turned to a quiet room adjoining, where he knew he would find his friend, the Baroness Ebersdorf.

Ludmilla was just then engaged in conversation with a group of admiring gentlemen, who modestly retired as soon as the prince approached. She was splendidly dressed in a costly, pale green silk, (she always preferred this color, for she knew how well it became her) with real pearls about her neck and arms and in her glossy black hair. But neither the blue rings under her eyes nor the unusual pallor of her beautiful face escaped the prince's notice.

"What is the matter, Baroness?" he asked, bowing to her with undisguised sympathy. "You seem disturbed and if my suspicions do not deceive me, our clever friend, Herr von Gleichen, is the cause of it. Heavens, he is much too zealous. Only think, — a secret family council almost every week! It is unbearable. I am thoroughly tired of the whole affair, and the only thing which

sustains me through the ennui of it all, is the prospect of a pleasant evening with you." And bending nearer to her, he asked in a low tone of voice: "We are still en petit comité?"

"Entirely at your Highness commands."

"And Countess Paula?"

"I hope will be present also, for her husband goes away to-morrow for a few days."

"Merci, merci. — I shall bring my nephew, Prince Ottomar, with me. The fellow is quite madly in love with the charming Paula, entirely without hope, of course — but he will not believe it. His success among women has spoiled him."

With a gracious smile he left her and walked to another group.

In the great hall Princess Henry had called Count Adlershorst to her side. The Count had been back several weeks from his wedding journey and was secretly making ready for the entrance of the King into his town residence. By this move he hoped to put a quick and decisive end to all the intrigues, which were being forged openly and secretly against the Monarch. This made him cheerful and happy. Moreover he was enjoying the greatest happiness in his recent marriage. Why then should he not look at the world cheerfully and gaily?

"I am glad, dear Count," the Princess said, "that you can inform me so favorably of the condition of His Majesty. From you, I am sure to learn the truth of the matter and to prove most decidedly, that the rumours abroad at present of ever new symptoms of illness are empty inventions."

The Princess was a delicate, pale woman, anything but handsome, yet with something unusually pleasing in her features. Something gentle and loving, a beautiful soul, shadowed by an expression of painful resignation, was visible there.

"Your Highness may rest quite at ease," replied the Count. "His Majesty is better than he has been for a long time. Only yesterday I saw him in a most happy mood. But to be sure, he had just made two people happy. He had arranged a wedding for one of his faithful servants, and Your Highness well knows, that our most gracious King can only be happy at heart, when he is permitted to give happiness, to do good or to dry the tears of care and sorrow."

The Princess' eyes lighted up with emotion. "Yes, I know that and it is on that account, that I love my Royal cousin so dearly. Indeed he deserves to be happier than he is, and can be, with his nature. He would like to have everything, his ministers and counsellors, his environment and his people perfect as far as possible. Therefore he feels doubly repelled by all the bad outgrowths of humanity, and his sensitive soul draws back into itself with aversion to the ever new and painful contact with the outer world. Oh! I understand it, I understand it only too well."

She sighed, but added immediately with a friendly look at the Count: "Perhaps your friendship will yet succeed in bringing the noble hermit back into the world, which under the present circumstances would be doubly desirable. He ought to have learned from you to trust again, and to believe in real faithfulness."

"Your Highness," replied Count Adlershorst smiling, "His Majesty needs not to learn that from me alone. Though many scoundrels have worked their way into the King's household, the greater part of his servants are still true, and in the mountains where the noble Lord, like a genius of fortune, spreads joy and pleasure everywhere, the country people are so devotedly attached to him, that they are ready, if need be, to defend him at any minute with their life's blood."

"God grant, this necessity may never arise," cried the Princess agitatedly.

The Count bowed in assent.

"Your Highness, that is my daily prayer."

The Princess nodded kindly to him.

"As long as you remain near my Royal Cousin, I fear nothing for him. You are indeed his best protection."

After Duke Ferdinand had made the rounds and was about to leave the assembly, he had retired into the conservatory, practically deserted during the dance, there to have another short talk with several of the princes present. In spite of his nearly seventy years, he still walked erect in the midst of the clerical and worldly office-holders, who stood about him in devoted attachment, and noticeably surpassed almost all of them in height. Though his hair and beard were now quite gray, his face still showed almost youthful energy and strength of will.

"And Her Majesty, the Queen Mother?" he turned to the confessor, who had held this position with the Queen since the death of the Abbé von Eichfeld; "has she been informed of the subject to be discussed in to-morrow's family-council?"

"Yes, Your Highness," was the submissive reply. "I consider it well, not to leave Her Majesty unprepared. Though her pious soul will submit to the hard fate allotted her and agree with the opinion of Your Highness, that recovery for the noble sick one is now only to be hoped for, through adequate medical treatment."

"The Queen has not seen her son for a long time?" asked the Duke meditatively.

"Not for a year. His Majesty — as I regret to have to inform Your Highness — spoke most unkindly at the time of his last visit about her simple, homely life, consecrated to prayer and religious devotions. And as Her Majesty made it understood, that she hoped by this life and through her incessant petitions to turn away God's wrath from the loved head of her son, the noble person in question became so indignant and angry, that he made bold to reply, he would answer to his God alone and needed no petitions, not even from his mother. Since then the Queen Mother has avoided another meeting. She recognizes of course the mental condition of His Majesty and bemoans it deeply, but she does not feel strong enough, to live through similar scenes."

The Duke frowned.

"I think, Your Reverence, Her Majesty ought not to be confirmed in her tendency toward asceticism."

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

"Her Majesty is the mother of the Royal son. She, like His Majesty, has an inflexible will."

The Duke agreed silently, then after a short pause

turned to the Minister von Feldheim, as though seized with a new idea.

"What do you think? A foreign paper was brought me yesterday, containing a notice which greatly astonished me, namely that the King has decided to give up his hermitic habits and to return to his Capital, there to pass a few weeks, and as in former times, to hold the usual receptions in his city-palace."

The minister bowed in regretful assent. He was a man in his best years, with strong, sharply cut features and cold restless eyes. Herr von Feldheim was known as an unwearying worker, whose ambition knew no bounds. On account of his remarkable ability he had been called by the King into the ministry, yet he had never arrived at a position near to the Monarch, and he had not won the influence, he longed for. The two natures were too different, and they repelled each other. In spite of this the King did not withhold the recognition merited by the efficiency of his minister, while the latter was working secretly for the fall of his Monarch, whose views and manner of life, he felt convinced, were opposed to the good of the country.

"So you knew about it, Your Excellency?" continued the Duke hastily, "and did not tell me? If it is true, then all the plans and decisions of the family-council seem to me premature. I myself have not seen my nephew, the King, for so long, that I must withhold any personal judgment regarding the state of his health."

"I fear," objected the minister, that the doctors, before whom the reports of the servants of His Majesty

were laid, have reached the right conclusion in their judgment. Still I am also of Your Highness' opinion that it is best to wait. His Majesty is accustomed to change his decisions rather often."

"Agreed, dear Feldheim," nodded the Duke graciously. "We will let events speak for themselves, I, for my part, defer everything for the present and shall wish that your pessimistic views be not realized!"

As soon as the tall figure of the Duke had disappeared from sight, those remaining, quickly gathered into groups in ardent conference. All were of the opinion that the Duke's last words meant failure for them.

Herr von Feldheim was standing apart from the others with the Justice von Gleichen, who, although a member of the opposition, commonly passed for his right hand man. He appeared very ill-humoured and disturbed.

"All that seems to me the work of Count Adlershorst," he said. "It is most unfortunate, that this man has cut short his furlough so soon and that he is again, as formerly, the privileged guest in Felsenschloss. Who was it, boasted he would keep him away? It seems to me, Herr von Gleichen, you have overrated your powers in this direction."

The Justice nodded sulkily.

"I acknowledge this failure, Your Excellency. I shall however try to make up for it. Perhaps we may yet succeed in removing the Count from the King's person. And by himself — of this I am sure — His Majesty would not risk the carrying out of his well-devised plans."

The minister shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear, my dear Gleichen, you are again promising more than you can do."

"I promise nothing, Your Excellency, but I will make the attempt."

"What attempt?"

"Let that remain my secret, it is safer at all events."

The minister scowled.

"No force, Herr von Gleichen. I tell you beforehand, I do not stand for that. I do not defend things that shun the light of day."

The Justice laughed with fine irony:

"Do I look like one, who is nursing murderous plans? On the contrary, I give your Excellency my word, that the person of Count Adlershorst is quite out of the question. The Count has now become so closely related to the house of the Baron von Ebersdorf, that he possesses full right to my deepest consideration."

This was half ironically, half, earnestly said, so that the minister did not exactly know what to gather from it. However so much seemed certain to him, that if anyone could unswervingly pursue his aims and bring them to a successful ending, the Justice was the man.

The minister shook hands heartily with him at parting.

"Do what you think best, dear Herr von Gleichen. There is no need to recommend cleverness and caution to you. You surpass us all in them already."

Chapter VII.

"It is time to go, Paula."

The young woman, heated by the dance, looks up at her husband with shining eyes and lays her arm hastily on his:

"Yes, let us go, Alphonse. The air of this hall suffocates me."

He looks at her, searchingly, anxiously. Then he leads her into a cool anteroom, walks slowly up and down with her a few times, and then calls to the servant to bring her fur mantle, which he himself carefully lays about her shoulders. A piercing cold reigns outside and Paula's slender figure clings close in the carriage to that of the Count, who has one arm about her as though to protect her. They drive silently home. But as the Count enters the brightly lighted vestibule of his comfortably furnished house, (a wedding gift from the King) a shadow of care still lies on his forehead. However he withholds all questions, until Paula has changed her festive gown with the aid of her maid for a warm blue wrap, trimmed with down and charmingly becoming. She then enters her boudoir, where she finds her husband awaiting her in unconcealed excitement.

Passionately he folds her in his arms. "What is the matter, Paula? tell me everything, I beg you. You are concealing something from me!"

"Oh, nothing about which you need to distress yourself, Alphonse! Prince Ottomar — you know his manner — overflowed again in gallantry towards me. But what I innocently submitted to when a girl, insults me now that I am your wife."

"And rightly so!" exclaimed the Count vehemently. "You cannot hold your name high enough, Paula. Prince Ottomar must respect it like any other man. What did he dare to do to you?"

"He did nothing which may be put into so many words, Alphonse, but there was something in his look, in the glance of his bold eyes, [which have respect for nothing, that frightened me."

The Count drew her closer to him and stroked her beautiful blond hair tenderly.

"The miserable wretch! I can easily see, how even the look of this man hurts the soul of a gentle woman. And yet I must go away and leave you alone! A duty, a holy duty calls me. It is a question of my dearly beloved King, of the throne, perhaps of his life!"

She started up with horror. "Of his life? You fear for the King's life, Alphonse?"

"I fear that his sensitive nature will not survive the fearful excitement, which awaits him, and yet I cannot spare him any of it. It has come to me from a sure source, that a consultation of doctors has been summoned to pass judgment on the health of His Majesty from the information received from the King's household. Of course, since this information is in part much exaggerated, in part wholly made up, the opinion has turned out unfavourably for the King, and the family-council of the Royal House will have to make its decisions accordingly. It is high time the King should rouse himself and through his personal appearance in his Capital and in Parliament knock all these rumors on the head."

"But will he be able to do it, he, who has kept himself from intercourse with strangers for so long a time?"

"He must, and a man with a strong will can do much," cried the Count. "It would be badly bestowed tenderness to give in to the King's weakness in this matter. Unfortunately there are enough corruptible creatures in his environment, who confirm him purposely in everything, which does him harm. My position is no easy one, Paula, in spite of the great affection, with which the King honours me. I must stand beside him imperturbably firm, all the more imperturbable as the King himself cherishes only a little hope of his rescue. The King is a fatalist and in his gloomy hours, which are only too frequent, he believes his fate is predestined. Only my power of persuasion, my influence succeeds in inviting him to action."

"Go, Alphonse, do your duty," she replied tenderly, "and be sure, that I am no more the child I was, when you met me in the spring at Princess Henry's party in her castle. Ought I not to have learned to protect myself in the three months spent at your side?"

He pressed her still closer to him.

"Do not misunderstand me, Paula. I trust you completely, but you do not yet suspect, how bad the world can be. If anyone should presume to insult the wife of Count Adlershorst, who is hated, because he possesses the King's trust, if —? But no, no, away with these imaginings! I almost believe the King's suspicious mind has infected me", he added, forcing a laugh, as he saw Paula's white face. "Even I ominously foresee harm approaching everywhere and I frighten with my fears my

sweet wife, who has a full right to find pleasure in life's roses."

"Not so," she objected. "Is there anything sweeter for a loving wife, than to bear a common sorrow with the loved one, to soothe the cares away from his forehead with a gentle hand? Do you know, Alphonse, that it was just your earnest spirit, the hard duties which you had taken on yourself at the King's side, which drew me to you?"

"I had heard much about you. They had often spoken of you in my father's house as a favorite of the King, and seemed to disdain you for this favor. Yet, from all their calumnies I learned how true you had been to him, how faithful you had stood by the side of the lonely, abandoned Monarch. This drew me to you, even before I knew you. Strange as it may appear, the more I heard the King attacked, the more I became interested in him."

"That is natural," said the Count. "He, whom an unjust world persecutes, appeals to the sympathy of a noble woman. In this case more so, as the faults of the King are so greatly outweighed by his good qualities. Whoever has lived near his castles, has heard of the many touching cases of noble, hearty sympathy, which he has shown the unfortunate. He is really the true, good Samaritan, who considers everyone his neighbour and who helps all, who need help".

Paula's eyes brightened with enthusiasm.

"That is true," said she, "and all the praise of the King's generosity, which I heard in Gundersbach during our summer residence there, awakened my interest in his other self, the much envied, the much abused Count Adlershorst. There I saw you at the garden-party of

Princess Henry, as the beautiful Schloss garden on the lake was transformed into a great bazar, and I, at the desire of the Princess, appeared as a Tyrolese maid, offering from my basket bouquets of edelweiss and cyclamine. You received my gift so proudly, so elegantly yet with a glance which pierced my heart."

"Yes, beautiful Tyrolean Maid, to see you, was to love you," cried he and drew her tenderly to him.

Perceiving the quieting effect of these conjured up memories, she tactfully continued; "You stuck the nosegay, which I gave you into your hat, and we began to talk, but were soon interrupted by the approach of my step-mother. You greeted her so icily, that I shuddered, for you see I had even then begun to care for you. I feared I might never see you again. But strange to say, the very opposite took place. No one opposed your advances, and as I, in the fullness of my heart spoke to my governess Emma Waldow of my meeting with you, she did not, as was her custom in other cases, seek to turn me away from you, but in her own quiet way confirmed my good opinion of you. 'Count Adlershorst is a splendid, most honourable man,' said she, 'and you may well be proud, Paula, if he should really take an interest in you.'

"Yes, certainly, they laid no obstacle in our way," cried the Count bitterly, "but, Paula, you little guess the real reason of their indulgence!"

"The reason?" asked she eagerly.

"They hoped through the power of love to remove the troublesome friend of the King from his side. You look quite surprised, as they kept hidden from your innocent ears what they secretly planned, and it is repugnant

to me to tell you anything, which could throw a shadow on our happiness. But it is best that you know all and learn to look about with open eyes. Can you believe that your step-mother, who had always shown so little sympathy for you, should now, for the sake of your happiness, suddenly overcome her peculiar antipathy to all who were devoted to the King? What you, my dear child, considered self-conquest, was on the contrary nothing less than using your young, innocent love to the carrying out of their selfish plans. Measuring me by their own measure, they hoped that ambition and love united would have power to lead me to forget my loyalty to my King. On this account your governess, Emma Waldow, also took my part — as she had been instructed to by your mother.”

Paula’s cheeks blanched, her hands trembled.

“Is it true, is it true?” sobbed she. “So shamefully have they played with the holiest emotions of my soul? And Emma Waldow, too? No, no, in her at least you are mistaken! She is innocent. From her have I learned only the good and the beautiful. As long as she was with me, she always helped me with kind words to bear the many hard things, which I had to endure in my father’s house. She cannot have been false and if she agreed to the miserable plans of my step-mother, it was only because she believed it was my happiness, which she was helping to promote. O certainly, it must be so.”

The Count, however he may have felt, calmed her excitement by seeming to assent.

“I will not rob you of your confidence and faith in your beloved teacher. But all the more you must consider what caution you must observe toward your

mother. She is really in league with all the enemies of our royal Master, especially with that revengeful, sly Justice von Gleichen, who declares that he is working for the welfare of his country, when in fact, he pursues only his own personal ends, hoping by the downfall of others to succeed to power and respectability, which he could not reach in an honest way."

"I, too," nodded Paula, "have never really trusted this smiling, obliging man, and am sure he never liked me."

"As evil is always the enemy of the good and pure," said the Count and drew his young wife tenderly to him.

A rococo-clock of Meissener porcelain now struck the hour of three. The Count started up.

"O Paula, dearest, I have kept you up too late. You must be tired. Let us go to rest."

The next morning Paula arose pale and weary. She hung tearfully upon her husband's neck saying as he left: "Come back soon to me. As soon as possible," adding thoughtfully: "and with the King. And may I," whispered she appealingly, "stay away from my step-mother's reception to-day? It will be hard for me, after knowing all this, to appear natural in her society."

"If you can control yourself, my darling, you would better go in spite of this. On the King's account we must be very cautious. It would surprise the enemy before the time, should we openly break with your step-mother."

Chapter VIII.

Baron Ebersdorf occupied the luxuriously appointed Bel-Etage of one of the magnificent new buildings in the principal streets of the Capital. The long row of windows shone out brightly into the night, though, in accordance with Ludmilla's promise to the Prince, only a small number of chosen guests had received invitations for the evening. There were a number of cavaliers from the Court with their ladies and several eminent actors and actresses from the royal stage, among whom were the Director Albert and the Prima donna, Frau Eva.

Prince Henry with his young cousin, Prince Ottomar, had not yet appeared, and this gave opportunity for the discussing of affairs not allowed to reach their ears.

Reports of the King's impending arrival in his Capital were also circulated among the guests, and some in fear and others in hope, secretly asked themselves what truth there could be in these rumours.

Justice von Gleichen, recognized as one of the initiated, was eagerly surrounded by those desiring news. He, however, only smiled importantly at the questions hurled upon him, threw here a jest, there a witty aperçus, but upon the longed for information, his lips were closed. Just at that moment a new arrival drew the attention of all. It was Count Goldberg, the intimate confidant of the King, and at this time, an unexpected guest in these rooms.

"Ah, that is portentous," whispered one of the cavaliers to his neighbor. "Count Goldberg in the camp of the

enemy! When the ship is ready to sink, the rats are ready to leave it!"

"What more do you wish?" was the answer. "Has not Count Adlershorst, the truest of the true, become a son-in-law of this house?"

"Certainly, but they say, his loyalty is uninjured. Yet, where is he? I do not see him?"

"He has service to-night with his Majesty, as Baron von Ebersdorf has just informed me."

"And Countess Paula?"

"She stands there near the Prima donna! See what a charming group! The proud luxurious Eva with the dark burning eyes, the crown of black hair over the thoughtful brow, in her magnificent cream colored gown, while in fine contrast to her dark beauty, stands this blond fairy in pale blue, the embodiment of youth and innocence!"

"Yet, it seems to me, the young Countess appears noticeably pale this evening."

"She is for the first time a grass widow, and the love of the young pair is really amazing."

A laugh was the answer. "Fabulous, old-fashioned, such a marriage! But Count Adlershorst is the intimate of the King, the idealist, that explains all!"

Paula in animated conversation with the Prima donna was called away by her father, who, monocle in eye, was openly seeking her.

"Ha, Countess Paula," he croaked, as he caught sight of her from a distance. "You are missed among the ladies," and with a glance at the Prima donna, who at Paula's departure was soon again surrounded by a circle of admirers, he continued in reproving tones: "The

Baroness had just called my attention to you. How unsuitable for the Countess Adlershorst to engage in so long a conversation with an opera singer."

"But, Papa," Paula ventured to object, "she is a guest in your house and as such can claim the same right as any other."

The Baron looked at his daughter for a moment in dumb astonishment, then growled sulkily: "Singular views! Have you not learned something from your much loved Waldow of the consciousness of rank? That, in these days of social equality, is the chief thing."

Count Goldberg, after greeting this and that eminent personality, was at last successful in passing through to Madame Eva. Everyone knew that he was one of the warmest admirers of the Prima donna. Indeed it was said, that he had the intention of suing for her hand. So much the more surprising was it that the beauty returned his greeting with marked coldness. Using her fan vehemently, she continued in conversation with the Director Albert, with whom she was discussing the choice of a song she had promised to the lady of the house.

"Trust my word, my lady," observed the Director, "that song is not suitable for the gay company assembled here to-day."

"Suitable or not, I shall sing this song or none," replied the prima donna with decision. "I have purposely selected this beautiful poem of Lenau's for this company. It is a call to the heart, a warning. I beg of you, let me have my way."

With that she stepped to the piano, Albert unwillingly submitting. And now with power, earnestness, and emotion, the song rang through the hall:

Unglück hat sein Herz ge- Stört mit Worten nicht des
 spalten, Streites,
 Lasst den stillen Mann allein. Nicht mit Lieben seinen Schmerz.
 Wie sich nicht genahet die Alten Ehret als ein blitzgeweihtes
 Einem blitzgetroffenen Hain. Enelysion dieses Herz.

"What a tragic song! Who is the composer?" buzzed the questions here and there.

"The composer? What other than the immortal Reinhardt."

"Reinhardt? And he sung here in this room? That is indeed strange here, where formerly his very name dared not be spoken!"

All eyes were turned upon the beautiful woman, whose former relations to Reinhardt were now brought forcibly to the memory of all present, and whose sudden start and pallor at the song from out the past could not be concealed. But with a mighty effort she banished the remembrance, which, a moment since, has stood before her in living reality. Why just now, this reminder of days long past, why now when the moment of revenge has drawn near? She knows through the Justice the utter hopelessness of the King's cause, and even though Prince Ferdinand should still hesitate, yet the judgment of the physicians, who had declared the King mentally abnormal and incapable of ruling, could not be overthrown. Still the King himself might, as his followers hoped, give proof

Leave the weary soul in peace,
 The one with sorrow-riven heart,
 As the ancients shunned a wood
 Struck by the lightning's dart.

Do not disturb with love his pain
 Nor with a wordy strife.
 Revere as Enelysion* holy,
 This heart with sadness rife.

* Enelysion, a place which had been struck by lightning was considered holy by the Greeks.

through his personal appearance, that the verdict of the doctors was without foundation.

But she had just received the assurance of the Justice, that no such results would take place. Of that, he would assume the responsibility. And she felt convinced, that he would keep his promise.

How he would begin, she did not know and indeed preferred not to know, for he had given her to understand, that in this case, it was better for her not to be concerned in the carrying out of his plans.

A sudden stir in the hall freed her from her thoughts. The servant announced the presence of Prince Henry and Prince Ottomar.

Forcing a smile to her lips, she hastened to her husband's side, that she might respectfully greet her royal guests.

Prince Ottomar's eyes eagerly searched the hall. He had come only for the sake of Paula, whom the Justice, a member of the same club, had held out prospects of his meeting here.

He was still a young man with a blasé expression. It was said, that years before, his excesses had called forth a sharp rebuke from the King, who was a severe judge in such cases and himself shunned all impurity. Since then Prince Ottomar had become one of his royal cousin's bitterest opponents and never lost an opportunity of ridiculing the high morals of his 'peculiar relation.'

It was the special wish of Prince Henry that his presence should in no wise disturb the company. With ease he mingled among those present, engaging in the light and easy conversation of which he was master.

Prince Ottomar, monocle in eye, followed him, and somewhat freely ogled the fair sex.

Paula, ever a little uneasy and embarrassed when the Prince loitered near her, sought, to avoid his glance as long as possible. But only too soon he discovered her and as he had been informed, that Count Adlershorst was not present, he believed that no barriers would be imposed upon him in the house of Baroness von Ebersdorf, Prince Henry's friend.

Had not Justice von Gleichen, the friend of the house, given him courage? If Count Adlershorst chose to leave his wife alone so often, that he might fanatically devote himself to his royal friend — fool — as the prince secretly called him, then he should not criticise her for receiving the homage of another. And should the Prince succeed in winning her regard, he would enjoy it, with no reproach of conscience. Count Adlershorst lived only in and for the King, for others he had neither ear nor eye. The thoughtless, amorous Prince did not need to reason thus a second time. Count Adlershorst was as uncongenial to him as was the King, and he felt it would be very agreeable to play a trick upon the favorite of his Royal cousin.

An agreeable amusement, a 'pour passer le temps' with a charming woman, whose youth and innocence inflamed the voluptuary, that was what Prince Ottomar sought, and for the accomplishment of which the willing Justice smoothed the way.

Now he stood at Paula's side and continually whispered trivial flattery in her ear. Modestly, yet with determination, she declined to hear him.

Count Goldberg had again drawn near to Frau Eva. He looked excited, his eyes sought hers imploringly.

"You are angry with me, divine Eva, why?"

"You ask, why?" she answered heatedly; "do you know what your presence here denotes? That you have broken faith with your Royal Lord."

The Count changed color. "You are also numbered among the guests of the house."

"I am a woman and you a man, and moreover one, formerly called a friend of the King."

"My heavens, what can one do under the circumstances! His life sinks in the balance. It is folly to try to save him."

"Really? Then loyalty is an especial folly? Answer me one question, Count Goldberg, is it true, that you are among those, who have witnessed against the King?"

Her eyes looked searchingly into his. He paled.

"Say no word of excuse", she continued with contemptuous tone. "Our paths from now on lie far apart. I have no room in my heart for a traitor."

She then turned her back upon him, while he gnashed his teeth in anger.

At last Paula was freed from her importunate neighbour. The great doors of the dining-hall were thrown open, showing the flower-decked table gleaming with silver and crystal. Prince Ottomar was obliged to offer his arm to a distinguished elderly lady.

"After supper, divine Paula," he whispered passionately.

The swarm of guests followed the two princes into the dining-hall. The viands were good, the wine excellent, all most extravagantly ordered. This was just what Prince

Henry loved: to move free and unrestrained in a circle of beautiful, pleasing women.

At the conclusion of the meal Prince Ottomar with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes impatiently followed his cousin, who escorted the lady of the house. His glance had often searched out Paula, who was even more entrancing to him for her youthful modesty, an unopened rosebud among all the luxuriantly blooming women.

The Justice had promised him that after supper he should have a private half-hour with the young Countess in the Baroness' boudoir. He could lead her there quite unobserved, and would take care that no one disturb them. The rest he would leave to the Prince himself.

Impatiently Prince Ottomar directed his steps through the pressing throng to the boudoir, which in its luxurious appointments of pale green seemed to exactly suit its possessor. But when the prince finally succeeded in freeing himself, he found to his unpleasant surprise an empty room. Neither Paula nor the Justice were to be seen.

Prince Ottomar's veins swelled with anger. Was he to be made a fool of? Did they not understand that he was a Prince of the Royal house? Frowning he turned back toward the hall. At that moment the Justice hastened toward him with a deep bow, smiling his ceaseless smile. "I beg your pardon a thousand times, but I assure you, I am innocent," he whispered in the ear of the visibly perturbed prince.

"The Countess Adlershorst has gone. She left the assembly quite suddenly and has returned home."

The prince uttered an angry oath.

"I must say, you have kept your promise very badly, Herr von Gleichen."

"Or Your Highness was perhaps too impetuous. The dove has flown from the claws of the hawk. Your Highness, next time you may find here more docile."

"Next time, but when will the next time be?"

"As soon as Your Highness commands."

And stepping with the prince into a window niche he conversed with him for a time in a low tone.

The prince's countenance gradually cleared and his eyes shone. He seemed extremely satisfied.

"Bravo, Justice, well planned. Yes, so it shall be. I shall depend upon you. But no second disappointment, mind you. That would indeed destroy my confidence in you." And he raised his finger threateningly.

"Your Highness shall be satisfied," answered the lawyer.

Chapter IX.

The thick snow fell in soft flakes, enveloping wood and mountains in a white mantle. With his hunting sack across his back, George von Randau walked at midday towards the Jagdschloss. The ancient building lay quiet and lonely with snowed-up windows. Herr von Feldau with his wife and children had gone for a visit to the forestry by the lake. The occasion was the mother's birthday festival, which was to be celebrated in the immediate family circle. George was detained in the upper forest by business, and Fräulein Waldow, the governess, had also

remained behind. She had felt ill and had not been visible the entire morning. So that he was the more surprised, as he walked through the garden, to see her coming wrapped in a mantle and evidently returning from a distance, for she walked slowly and appeared extremely exhausted. As fast as the deep snow would allow him, he hastened to her to offer the protection of his arm. His relations with the governess had ever remained those of a stranger, as her reserve admitted no confidential intercourse. Yet he felt for her the same sympathy as when he first came into her presence, — the woman so silent, and yet so visibly suffering under a hard yoke. He had learned that she was an orphan, that her father had been an officer in the retinue of the widowed Queen and had perished while journeying through the mountains. Through the kindness of the Queen she had been brought up in a convent and educated as a teacher. This explained to the young man in some small measure, her shyness and reserve. Yet she was very zealous in the performance of her duties and her two young pupils loved her most dearly in spite of a certain severity in her discipline. Also Frau Katharina observed with joy the mental growth of her daughters under the direction of their governess and gave repeated proofs of her high appreciation. At the Christmas festival, which George celebrated with his parents in the Capital, she had accompanied the Feldau family to the forestry by the lake. Thus she was considered an intimate member of the family, even though the old forester could not suppress his distrustful feelings toward the ward of Justice von Gleichen, whom he ever viewed with instinctive aversion. Yet, in spite of the pleasant days spent there, she did not return in happier spirits;

indeed her cheeks were so white, her entire feeling seemed so pervaded by a nervous unrest, that Frau Katharina was not surprised at her request not to be included in the excursion of the morning.

"Shall we bring a doctor back with us?" inquired the kind woman, full of sympathy. "You really look ill."

This offer Emma Waldow had refused, in a friendly but decided manner. She knew her own nature, and knew rest to be the best help in restoring her health. And now George beheld this young woman presumed ill, trembling with cold, battling her way along the street in a snow storm. Even her veil, which she had drawn over her face was frozen hard with her breath. Contrary to her usual custom, she accepted George's kindness and allowed him to help her into the house.

"I will call some of the women at once to your assistance," he said anxiously, as she leaned motionless and utterly overcome against the wall of the entrance hall.

"Call no one, I implore you," she uttered wearily.

"Then permit me at least to lead you into a warm room, where you may recover more quickly," pleaded George. She submitted quietly while he put his arms about her and led her, half fainting, into the warm and pleasant hall of the castle. She sank with closed eyes upon a sofa and became unconscious. A moment he stood undecided, not knowing whether to obey her injunction or to call someone to her help. But quickly deciding, he tore the wet veil from her face, covered her with a warm rug, and began to rub her chilled hands zealously. At the same time he studied her face, which was full of suffering and bore the unmistakable stamp of a lofty spirit. A strange feeling surged through him.

In the breast of the youth something awoke that had slumbered long, his heart beat faster with a thrill of tender, thoughtful love. Now the fine, dark-lashed lids began to quiver, then she raised herself and the deep starry eyes he had admired so often, gazed questioningly upon him. Suddenly, as consciousness returned, she seized his hand and implored him in passionate tones:

"Do not leave me, Herr von Randau, not yet — I must — must speak with you."

"My dear Fräulein," said he seating himself by her side, "I am glad to remain, if I may but help you."

"Help me? No, that no one can do, no one! But for a being whom I love, for a life that is worthy because it is a happy, a rich one, I pray for your assistance."

With repeated efforts and help from George, she succeeded in sitting upright, taking pains to move farther from his side.

"Not the cold," she began hastily, "overcame me, but the misery of my soul, which tortures me with the pains of hell. O, Herr von Randau, do not look with such sympathy upon me. I am unworthy of your sympathy, I am unworthy of the sympathy of any good being! Yet indeed it is not a matter which concerns me, but another. O, my God, how shall I begin to make you understand the horror!"

Weeping she buried her face in her hands. George believed in spite of her assurance, that it was illness exciting her, and waited in expectant silence for her further utterance.

"You are happy," she began in quick, broken sentences. "You have parents who love you, whom you can love. This joy I have never known. As an orphan, ten years

of age, through the kindness of the Queen I was placed in an educational institution. Justice von Gleichen was appointed as my guardian. He, whom I was accustomed to regard as my benefactor, to whom I owed gratitude and obedience, he has made me what I am."

George felt a sudden foreboding. "In God's name, what have you become? You have not lent yourself to something — —?"

"To perform the service of a spy — yes", she interrupted in a hard voice. "Now you know all, now despise me as I deserve. And yet, how could I, brought up within the walls of a convent, knowing nothing of the world, drilled in unconditional obedience, how could I know what it meant, when my guardian, who had brought me as Paula's governess into the family of Baron Ebersdorf, commissioned me to inform him of the occurrences in that house. I wrote my experiences for him as I had carried out every other commission, he had given me. And it consoled me, when I soon learned how much I could be to the dear child, who was intrusted to me, one who was starved in heart and soul by the stepmother who thought only of herself and the success of her vanity. For the sake of remaining with Paula, whom I loved with the warmth of an hitherto empty heart, I acquiesced in all. Then came a day when my pupil, now grown, made the acquaintance of Count Adlershorst. I knew, he was considered an enemy to the house of the Baron and was not a little surprised, when in spite of that, I was secretly commissioned by my guardian to help on the union in every way. I realized that I must soon leave the dear child, but I overcame every jealous feeling. If she were only happy, and from all I had heard of the

Count, I dared to hope this. But wherefore paint this picture farther? I soon saw, that Paula had been chosen merely as a means for securing the Count's assistance in the plans and purposes of Justice von Gleichen. I was required to use my influence with Paula that she, in turn, might be the means of persuading the Count to relinquish the Royal service. I made the attempt, but Paula's pure and sensitive nature drew me back, ashamed: How could I turn the man I love, from his duty? she replied. I was silent and gave her answer to the Justice. 'You are not clever,' he said angrily. He was now willing that I should accept the offered position in the house of Herr von Feldau, for he believed that there also, I might be of use to him."

"Here also," ejaculated George trembling.

"Here also, I performed, and still perform the work of a spy," she answered harshly. "What indeed could hold me back from reporting in the house of a stranger? All that held me to life was taken from me in the separation from Paula. So I found myself in the hands of fate and patiently allowed myself to be made a machine, which other hands set in motion. Here with Herr von Feldau I heard many opposing views. Where hate and ridicule were the King's portion in the house of the Ebersdorf's, here he received sympathy and reverence in full measure. This confused me; but I did not wish to reflect, for I felt convinced that, if I did reflect, I should condemn and learn to hate myself. So I was carried farther down the stream, a creature whom others turned and twisted as they would. Again I sought comfort in the strictest performance of my duty as a teacher, in regard to which you have had the kindness to speak with approbation. But my day of fate drew near."

She raised herself, her eyes widening with terror.

"Last evening I received, by an express messenger a letter from my guardian, commanding me to go to-day, during the absence of the Feldau family, to the house of Baroness Ebersdorf in Gundersbach. That my visit might be unobserved, I was to go on foot. It is not far and I was not unwilling to comply. They believed me shut in my room. I was absent the entire morning. Herr von Gleichen was there when I arrived and greeted me with great complaisance. But in his cold gray eyes lay something that frightened me; something furtive and unpleasant, as if he were plotting that which feared the light of day and must be carried on in secret. 'I must ask of you to-day, a very special service, dear child, perhaps the last,' he said. 'If I succeed in what I am undertaking, the goal will be quickly reached, and you shall be released from further demands, which I plainly see are no longer willingly fulfilled.'

"Have I ever willingly fulfilled them? though I but remained silent.

"What is it, you wish me to do? I asked. 'Only a trifle,' he answered and a scornful expression played over his tightly closed mouth. 'You must write a letter in my interests. Sit here at the Baroness' writing table. It will not take long.'

"I obeyed mechanically.

"To whom? I inquired.

"That you shall soon know.'

"And now he dictated:

'My dear Paula! Sick, suffering, grieved to death, I have arrived in the Capital. I have been granted a leave of absence until I regain my health. Will you visit

your former teacher and friend and thus give her an hour of joy? Oh, you know how I love you — so visit me to-morrow about nine o'clock in the evening in my modest retirement with Frau Berner. During the day, I belong unfortunately to my physician.' I must then write my name, the name of a street in the Capital, and the number of an house entirely unknown to me. Do not wonder that every word is engraven in my heart, never to be obliterated. I had a foreboding that I, who would gladly give my life for Paula, had lent my hand to some villany against her. Herr von Gleichen reached hastily for the letter, but I held it back. You shall not have the letter, until I know its purpose, said I.

'Fool!' he cried. 'Ask no questions, but do what I tell you.'

'Nevermore! Paula is dear to me. I have done all that you desired, Herr von Gleichen, but this one holy place in my heart, you dare not touch. This confidence Paula has placed in me shall not be used to her injury. For a moment he looked at me confounded. 'I see, you would like for once to show your will, little one. Very well, so be it. I promise you, that nothing shall happen to your Paula — and now write the address.'

"You swear it to me?"

"I swear it."

"I obeyed, he took the letter."

"Now write, if you please another letter."

"I asked nothing farther, what its purpose, or to whom. It was all the same to me, since it did not concern Paula. — Now he dictated anew. The second letter comprised only a few words: it was a summons, as in Paula's letter, to come at nine o'clock to the same house in the same street

but with this addition: 'It concerns your honour and the honour of your wife, who has been enticed into a trap.' Then this subscription: 'A friend who will be nameless.'

"I had written thus far without anxiety — now I again hesitated. A dark suspicion arose within me. Had Herr von Gleichen given me his oath so unhesitatingly only to secure my compliance, and did he indeed plan evil against Paula?

"Now he gave me the address: Count Adlershorst, Felsenschloss.

"What are you doing? I cried, and the pen dropped from my hand. Remember your oath!

'Write', he thundered and his cold, gray eyes pierced mine so threateningly, that my strength of resistance vanished, at least for the moment, and I, wretched creature, obeyed.

"He tore the letter from me and hastened from the room leaving me to the tortures of my conscience. A few moments later I heard the sound of his sleigh arriving to take him to the nearest railway-station. Once he returned to the room and asked me, if, on account of the bad weather I would accept a place in his sleigh and offered to bring me to the Jagdschloss. I declined — and then suddenly broke out in a torrent of words, giving vent to my long felt abhorrence of the man who should have been to me a father and who had become the destroyer of my life. I raved, I know not what: threats, lamentations, all culminating at last in the prayer to spare Paula, to give me back the accursed letters.

'Too late, my child,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'A messenger has already ridden away with the letters. And since your blood seems so heated, it will no doubt

do you good, to take a walk through the ice and snow. So cool off, and become reasonable once more, then when we meet again, I will forget how you have conducted yourself toward me to-day.'

"With that he left me and soon I heard the sound of his sleigh bells dying away in the distance. Perplexed, despairing, I stood there. My head was confused. I sought in vain a way of deliverance. All at once, you, imagine it, Herr von Randau, you came before my soul as a sign from heaven. You have warm enthusiasm for all that is good and have shown sympathy for the quietly borne suffering of the poor governess. You are a relation of the Ebersdorf family. That settled my resolution to confide in you. Overcome in body and soul I set out on my homeward way. Thicker and thicker the snow fell about me. I scarcely felt it. Anxiety drove me ever forward. If I should come too late! When nearing the house I saw you, weakness suddenly overcame me. Now you know all. Counsel me, help me, Herr von Randau, what can I do, what shall I do to avert this horror?"

She gazed feverishly at George, who was deeply moved by her narrative. He considered quickly.

"I will go at once to Felsenschloss. Perhaps I may succeed in finding the Count."

"It will be too late," cried Emma despairingly. "And then in the storm, with darkness fast approaching."

George stepped to the window. The snow was still falling with unabated force.

"I must try in any event. I shall take the hunting sleigh, which Herr von Feldau has placed at my disposal."

He then stepped up to Emma and took her hand. She turned away her face, trembling.

"Poor girl," he said with emotion.

"What! You pity me still, you do not condemn me?"

"Who am I, that I should judge? You are a weak woman and have been badly treated... But we will speak of this later. To-day I ask but one thing of you. Try to become composed and do all that is necessary for the recovery of your health. Do this for the sake of this family, concerning whom you have much for which to atone."

"Atone — ah, if I only could!"

"You can, and you shall! Now farewell and pray for me that I may succeed in reaching the castle in time to prevent the carrying out of this miserable plot."

She gave him a glance, expressing all the thanks, all the anxiety and care for him, which at that moment filled her soul. In an instant he was gone and she heard him without, ordering the sleigh.

Chapter X.

In Felsenschloss the servants ran excitedly to and fro, trunks were being packed, carriages and sleighs were taken from the coach house, all in preparation for the night journey of the King to his Capital. The Monarch himself walked with restless steps to and fro in his study. He looked pale, deep lines lay under his eyes and at times a nervous tremor went through his limbs. Now he stood at the high window and gazed fixedly out into the thick snowdrifts.

"My inexorable destiny grudges me so much as a farewell look at my beloved mountains", he murmured. "Darkness about me, darkness within me. How can, how shall it end?"

He turned again to his writing desk, and cast his eyes upon a folded note, which a messenger had that morning brought him from his cousin, Prince Edgar. It contained only a few words, a warning, which he did not understand, and over the meaning of which he had been pondering. For he knew that his cousin was among the few, yet true to him. So weight must be laid upon his every word. Over and again he perused the boldly written lines.

'Have a care. There is a conspiracy against you. Haste is needed. You must personally lead your own cause.'

"So — there is a conspiracy against me, — but what?" If the warning were only plainer. They surely would not dare to work against their rightful King? — And yet — had not Count Adlershorst spoken to him in the same way? His people were not satisfied with him, and why? Because he lived a retired, a lonely life? But had he not in spite of that, held his Royal Office conscientiously, had he not examined with painful exactness every document given him to sign? But, after all, what power did he really have in the state affairs? His responsible ministers ruled, and with them, the Cabinet. But whenever an important decision had been laid in the King's hand, had he not, according to his best knowledge, unmoved by party conflict, known how to bring to pass what seemed to him right?

Or did they reproach him for his generous tendencies, his love of building, which injured no one but himself, which made him alone poor? And who were finally benefitted through his fondness for building? Surely the people themselves, while he was satisfied merely to rejoice in the beauty of his erections. Should he let a somewhat malicious article in the newspaper spoil his joy in that which he had created? And after all was he not the King, the Lord and ruler of the land? They forget to fear him, because he respects the rights of others and lets the critics speak and write as they will, without being called to account! He raised his head higher, his beautiful dark eyes flamed.

"You wish to feel the hand of the ruler? Very well — you shall have your will! I will show you what I am, what I am able to do! I will show you all, you, who have envied me the free flight of my soul, you, who would make me like yourselves, who would draw me down to your own level, you, who know nothing more than the petty needs of the day, who desire nothing more than the gratification of your vanity and sensuality."

With quick decision he pressed his finger upon the bell. Old Lippert stepped in with anxious demeanour. It pierced the servant's true soul to see the bitter sufferings of his beloved master, whom he had known as a youth, in whose service he had grown old, and from whom he had experienced only kindness and friendship. For more than an hour he had been standing by the door of the ante-room, listening for a final cessation of the restless, incessant wandering to and fro.

"Your Majesty commands?"

"Ask Count Adlershorst to come here."

Lippert hastened on his errand with a lighter heart. As soon as His Majesty desired the presence of any one, then indeed, his darkest mood had vanished.

Count Adlershorst had his hands full in arranging for the impending departure. Therefore it did not seem surprising to the old servant, that he received the King's message with a somewhat embarrassed, concerned expression. But the cause of his embarrassment lay in an entirely different direction. At present the Count would have avoided any discussion with the King. He had an idea of what the conference would treat and for the first time he dared not be frank and open with his royal friend, he must for the king's sake conceal what, since yesterday, had lain heavily upon his heart. A few days previous he had been a guest in the forest-house by the lake, but not for a happy family festival was he there, but rather to hold earnest consultation with the true men there assembled, among whom Professor Romuald Wallburg, who had come from the Capital, could be seen.

"The times are too serious for us, to celebrate your birthday as formerly with music and feasting," the old forester had said consolingly to his aged, but still charming wife. "The true patriot may think to-day of but one, his oppressed King. Oh, wife, that I must experience this! This youth so aspiring, so full of hope, this glorious mind, this noble heart so early crushed! By all that is holy, I would that the Lord had called me a few years earlier, before my eyes had beheld such a sight!"

"Do not sin, Wallburg," admonished his wife. "Since the Lord has preserved your life, he has indeed a wise purpose concerning you. Yours are two true eyes and

even though they are old, they are of a special value now, when everywhere loyalty wavers and each one seeks his own advantage."

This was only too truly spoken, for on Romuald's arrival from the city, he had brought information, which plunged all present into the deepest consternation.

Through a friendly physician he had learned the verdict of the Council of physicians, called together by the royal family.

"I feared this," lamented the gray-haired Father Berner deeply moved, "those God-forgotten lackeys, who have experienced far too much kindness from our gracious Lord, have betrayed and sold him as Judas did our Saviour. Lackey Licht has told me all. They have written down everything, every thoughtless word they have added to and misrepresented. And that snake, Justice von Gleichen, the friend of Baroness von Ebersdorf, has collected all the evidence and joined it together, turned and twisted it, until the snare is complete. Ah, can not one such a villain drive a noble spirit to destruction!"

"By heavens, yes", broke in Romuald, "the words of the poet still hold good: „Wer bei gewissen Dingen seinen Verstand nicht verliert, der hat keinen zu verlieren."

"How is it possible," broke in Count Adlershorst, "to render a judgment so difficult without having observed His Majesty more closely, or to judge only on the testimony of servants?"

"Not alone the servants," answered Romuald, "they say Count Goldberg has also given testimony and that by word of mouth."

"Ah I thought that this lady's man would prove a traitor," said the old forester scornfully. "Men of his type, who seek enjoyment alone, are trustworthy only so long as it is to their advantage."

Count Adlershorst stared grimly before him.

"I will reckon with this man at another time. Now it behooves us above all else to save the King."

"The blessing of God and all the Saints be with you, Count, in this noble work," said Father Berner. "I hope with you, as soon as his true people once more see the face of their beloved king all these phantoms of hell, that have been conjured up, will flee away."

"Perhaps! And yet if he should learn, should learn too early, if an unforeseen accident should reveal to him the dreadful verdict pronounced upon him to-day by the physicians! Upon this, everything depends. What you have quoted, Professor, I unfortunately can only repeat."

"He must not learn it yet, not until he is again secure in his own self-confidence, until his opponents have felt his hand and his will," cried the old forester.

"Whatever lies in the power of men to guard him from that knowledge, shall be done," answered the Count earnestly.

"Our hope is in God", said the old priest in solemn trembling tones. "Let us do our part and submissively leave the results in the hand of the Highest."

"Yes, in God is our hope!" How often since last evening had the Count repeated to himself these words. Yet his heart was heavy and the joyful confidence that had been his a few days before, began to waver. If the King should learn the whole truth, what might there

not be feared from his excitable temperament? And how long would it be possible to conceal it from him, who at times saw so clearly into the depths of the human soul, and before whose searching look no lie could endure? And must he now confront this searching look? What wonder, that he followed old Lippert with a sigh.

Still he tried to show a bright face, as he stepped into the Monarch's study. The King's thoughts seemed very distant, as he advanced a few steps to meet the Count.

"Come here, dear Count, and sit beside me, I have some questions to ask you."

The Count was alarmed. Had the Monarch already been informed?

He seated himself opposite the King, who rested for the first time that day. The slender white hand, which held out Prince Edgar's letter, trembled slightly.

"Read this, dear Count, perhaps you can enlighten me concerning its meaning, or do you know nothing about it?"

The Count delayed his answer a moment, as he perused the lines with great care and thought. Then the King knew nothing as yet.

"I know what it means to my sorrow, Your Majesty", he then answered with composure.

The King's eyes looked searchingly into his.

"And do you know, dear Count, just what they want of me, what they are all aiming at? I beg of you, keep nothing back. As your friend and king, I demand perfect frankness from you."

"Your Majesty, it is always the same complaint. They reproach Your Majesty for estranging Himself from your

people. They desire to see the Monarch in his Capital, that he live in the midst of his true subjects and that he feel happy among them."

"Feel happy?" — repeated the King softly and with a melancholy look — "indeed if one only could feel happy by command, dear Count, I would be very glad to obey. — And is that all?"

The Count hesitated a moment.

"All that I know, Your Majesty."

"And you are keeping nothing from me?"

"Nothing!"

The Count's brow flushed darkly. The lie was hard for him and yet in this case the truth would be a crime.

To his relief at this moment a light knock was heard, — old Lippert's sign that he had something to announce.

The King started up full of nervous unrest.

"Again an interruption."

The servant passed him a folded note.

"For the Count."

"A letter in a strange hand. Who brought it?"

"A messenger on horseback, who ordered me to use the greatest haste."

"Did he expect an answer?"

"No, he turned his horse about immediately and galloped off."

"Hm," murmured the Count and twisted the letter hesitatingly. What if some new villany were behind this? As Lippert again left the room, he raised his eyes inquiringly toward the King, who gazed back at him intently.

"Open your letter. "Whatever it may hold, if from friend or enemy, it is always well to look facts clearly in the face."

The Count obeyed; but scarcely had his eyes traversed the few lines, when he paled and sank back weakly in his chair.

"A knavish trick, Your Majesty."

"Against whom?" said the King starting. "Against me? Oh, I am accustomed to knavish tricks, yet, speak, what is it?"

"This time, it concerns not Your Majesty."

"It concerns you, Count, it concerns you?" cried the King eagerly. "So much the worse. They use their weapons against you that they may strike me through you, the best, indeed the only friend I possess! Yet it is my right to know all."

The Count silently passed the letter to the King. He read it hastily and his brow clouded. "Ah, an attack on your beautiful young wife! Have you any idea, who the rascal can be?"

"I fear, Prince Ottomar, Your Majesty's cousin."

A flash of the eyes, a twitching of the lips and the King broke out in a tone of deepest disgust:

"I thought as much! Who else could it be, but this rotten twig on the noble branch of our house! He has always been the slave of his own passions, and bears ill will towards me, because I, with no respect of person, gave him the reproof he deserved. It would give him indeed a devilish pleasure to stretch out his hand toward the wife of the man, who stands nearest me! — But he must have a care, or I shall make an example of him! This

time he shall not get off with a rebuke. Yes, the higher he stands, the more severely shall be dealt with!"

The King had been speaking with such great vehemence that, for a moment, he almost forgot the particular cause of his wrath. Yet as soon as his glance fell upon the Count, who had sunk into dark brooding, he laid his hand warningly upon his adjutant's shoulder.

"No long consideration, my dear Count. Hasten, save your young wife from the threatened destruction!" And drawing out his watch, he continued quickly:

"There is still time. You can take the train and can be at the house mentioned in the letter at the appointed hour."

"What?" replied the Count, his feelings conflicting painfully. "I forsake your Majesty now?"

"There is no other way, dear Count, I grant you leave of absence most willingly."

Still the Count lingered with despairing face.

"Dare I, can I? Holy God! My beloved, my innocent wife!"

"Why do you linger? Every moment is precious," warned the King.

"But if this letter should be only a lie, with the one object of drawing me away from Your Majesty?"

The King started.

"That may be possible. And yet — you must go. You must convince yourself. For if it indeed be true, it is dreadful to think of. No, no, I command you. Hasten away, and return to me as quickly as possible."

"Then I beseech Your Majesty to begin the journey toward the Capital without me. Every day may be fatal to Your Majesty."

"A delay of one day? Dear Count, you jest. And then, frankly you know I am a fatalist. Have I not always told you so? In truth, dear friend, I need your presence for the carrying out of this decision, I have made at so much cost," he continued sighing. "And now, farewell."

The Count bowed over the King's hand.

"Till we meet again. Till we joyfully meet again, God willing!"

A few moments later the Count's noble race horse bore him at full speed toward the nearest railway station.

Chapter XI.

Martin, the old coachman, was busy cleaning the magnificent carved royal sleigh, when he received notice, that the journey to the Capital had been postponed until the following evening.

"I thought as much," said he, shrugging his shoulders in disgust, to Sepp, a former lackey, who now held a position as doorkeeper and lived with his young wife in a charming little house by the gate. "I see well enough, that nothing will come out of this moving to the Capital, the Saints be blamed."

"Ah, are you longing so much for the pleasures of the Capital, old Martin?" jested Sepp.

The old man put his hands on his hips and looked at the handsome young fellow. Then with a shake of the head, he began:

"You thoughtless fellow! Do you not know, how important it is for our gracious Lord, that he should take this trip? Have you not heard what the miller Alois was telling recently in the Almen Inn, how in the Capital they are planning evil against His Majesty? So that is the gratitude you show, Sepp, to your benefactor and Master, who has given you such a nice little house to live in and allowed you to wed your Bärbel! You can joke, when things look so threatening for our most gracious Lord! Listen, Sepp, if you are not ready to give your bones, for our good, our beloved Master, then —"

"Hush, hush, Martin", and Sepp tried to appease the excited old man. "Who says that I am not ready? But you must know, I do not believe all the gossip. What can they really have against our noble Master? And then, is he not the King, the ruler, the all powerful?"

"You talk according to your understanding, Sepp," grumbled old Martin." The young think, because for them the heavens are full of music, that the whole world is a happy dancing place. By heavens, boy, I would give a great deal, if it were so. But, more's the pity, God in heaven has other things to do, than to just look after us. Just look around you, Sepp", he continued. "See what serpents we have in our midst. I do not speak of Licht, he is a numbskull anyway, but of all the lackeys here, there are three, Nazi, Peter and Ambrose, whom I do not trust one step of the way. They have looked after themselves, that is true, but it is blood money and heaven will condemn them for it. They are the small ones, but the treachery climbs higher, ever higher, traitors, rascals everywhere, who think only of filling their own pockets. Sepp, Sepp, keep your eyes open, or they

will draw the cap over the eyes of all of us, who are true to our gracious Lord and we, with him, shall be made way with without grace or mercy."

"Why, Martin, how you talk?" said the other. Made way with? It will not affect our lives, nor the King's life, will it?"

The old man shook his head.

"Have we not much that is dear to us besides life? Shall we look on quietly, while authority is wrested from our Lord and King? Not I, Sepp, not I, and you must reconcile it with your conscience, if you can."

Before Sepp could defend this attack on his honour, sleighbells were heard sounding faintly through the drifting storm.

"Hang it, who rides in this weather through this dark night on the country roads", marvelled the coachman, craning his neck curiously.

"Perhaps another express message!" cried Sepp.

"Those express-messages never seem to stop. If we only knew, what is going on in the Capital! You have really affected me with your fear, Martin."

He said this as they thus walked together to the entrance gate.

There stood Bärbel of the Almen Inn, the gatekeeper's young wife with her head in a thick woolen shawl, to protect her from the heavy falling snow. She beckoned eagerly to her husband from the threshold.

"The devil," cried old Martin viewing the traveller, who halted at the gate. "This is certainly the Forstmeister's sleigh, and in this weather! This means something, Sepp!"

"It is Herr von Randau from the Jagdschloss, cried Bärbel approaching. "He wishes to speak to you, Sepp."

Old Martin nodded confidently to the pretty young wife, whose glowing face looked out pleasantly from her enveloping shawl. He lingered beside her, as Sepp hastened through the small gate to the sleigh in which George, almost turned into a snowman, waited impatiently.

"May I speak with Count Adlershorst?" he asked.

"I regret to say, Sir, the Count left for the City an hour ago."

An oath escaped George's lips.

"Too late! Do you know when the next train goes?"

"That I can tell you exactly. The Count took the last train to-day."

"The last!" cried George startled. "That is not possible!"

"Oh yes, it is true! Has the gentleman no time table at home? In order to reach the train at the right time, you should have left the Lodge an hour earlier. But, really, it is easy to be late in this weather."

At this the driver turned and said: "Anyway, you could not go farther, Sir. The horses cannot go on".

In the meantime old Martin had joined the gate-keeper and was examining the horses with a knowing air.

"Yes, yes, Sir, the boy is right. It would be cruel to compel them to go farther. Lead them," he said good-naturedly, "to the stable, where the work-horses are. I will order a few measures of oats to be given them, and then they will be able to go on."

The boy did not wait to be told twice.

"If the young Sir will step into the gate house, I will cover the sleigh," said he, beginning to unharness the horses.

"Yes, I pray the gentleman, to do us the honour," invited Sepp, and reluctantly yielding to necessity, George followed the others into the gate-house.

Within a maid shook the snow from his stiffening mantle, and in the brightly lighted room stood Bärbel with flushed cheeks, placing on the clean oak-table a cup of hot coffee.

"Herr von Randau must be frozen," she said courtesying, and gave him a chair near the warm stove.

After his long ride through the snow and the cold, the picture of this snug comfort greeting him was so pleasing to the young man, that for the moment the shadow vanished from his brow.

"Ah, Frau Bärbel," said he, "Good luck to you. You have a charming nest for yourself and your Sepp."

Sepp answered for his wife. "The whole thing is a wedding present from His Majesty," he said proudly.

At the mention of the King, there fell anew over George's heart the burden of care, which brought him hither.

"My good gatekeeper," he cried. "Suggest a means. I must reach the Capital, must speak with Count Adlershorst."

"Is such great haste necessary?" inquired Sepp.

"Indeed, everything depends upon the fact that I speak to the Count in time."

"But indeed, there is no way possible," said Sepp

with a shrug of the shoulders." Herr von Randau must be patient till morning."

George's head sank on his breast in despair.

"Ah it is too late. Ah me!"

Sepp had been secretly whispering with his wife and now turned again to George.

"If the gracious Sir would consent to occupy our little gable room for the night, he would be most welcome. Then he could be sure to reach the station in time, for the morning train."

"I will accept," nodded George, „but where shall the horses stay? I shall need them again early in the morning."

"Martin has already looked after them, Sir. The sleigh we will push into the wood-house. In a matter concerning Count Adlershorst, for whom everyone here would go through fire, everything possible will be done."

The heavy step of Martin, the coachman, was heard without. Sepp beckoned him to come in. The worthy man was indeed ready to fulfil the wishes of Herr von Randau in anything touching good Count Adlershorst. He would have been glad to learn more of the affair. But George manifested a great reserve in the matter, and so the old man was forced to go without having his curiosity satisfied. In the meantime Bärbel set out whatever kitchen and cellar had to offer. She was very proud to entertain so distinguished a guest, an inhabitant of the Hunting Lodge and at present a member of the Feldau family. So she chatted gaily, told him of the fine wedding celebration, which she owed to the kindness of the King, and told how his Majesty had even

condescended to be present in person at the ceremony in the Cloister Church.

"I suppose, young Sir," she continued, "that when you were first with us last autumn, in the Almen Inn, you heard it said, that His Majesty avoided everyone. But now you know better. Every child about here knows him, and to many has he spoken words of comfort and encouragement."

New Sepp dropped into the conversation and had many a deed to relate, showing the King's great love for his fellow-men. George listened with the deepest interest. Oh, if the people in the Capital only knew this, he thought, if he could only repeat to them, just what had been told him here. Then would they judge the King differently, they would more willingly excuse his oddities, and the half-diseased singularity which sometimes, perhaps against his will, drove him farther than was wise, they would accept it along with so much excellence and ability!

The conversation continued later than George had intended. Yet rest was long in coming in spite of the daintily prepared bed in the little guest chamber. Tormenting care chased sleep from his eyes. What might have happened during the time unless a merciful God had held his hand protectingly over the Count's head!

Chapter XII.

His heart filled with a thousand torturing and despairing thoughts, Count Aldershorst had arrived the evening before in the Capital. The train had been some-

what delayed on account of the snowdrifts and the great clock on the tower of the Schloss Church sounded a quarter past eight, as he rang at the door of his home.

What should he find? The dreadful confirmation of the contents of the anonymous letter, or merely a plot, that had been used to entice him away from the King and to delay his Majesty's greatly feared departure, if but for one day?

The servant, who received him appeared surprised, but in no way alarmed.

"Is the Countess at home?"

"Her Grace drove out half an hour ago. The carriage has already returned, the Countess having given orders, that she should be called for in an hour, as she wished to walk home."

Adlershorst trembled, but forced himself to speak quietly:

"You may remain here. I will call for the Countess myself."

He hastened to his room to exchange his heavy fur travelling coat for a light military cape. Then he turned to go.

His way led him past the Countess's boudoir. He paused and after a moment's consideration stepped within. Perhaps he could find some enlightenment as to whom Paula could be visiting in the house assigned, which at present was a dark riddle to him. He hastily noted the writing desk. Yes, there lay an open letter carelessly thrown down.

"Ah! I thought as much!" he ejaculated as he read. "So this Emma Waldow is a traitor in the pay of our

enemies. The false one — oh, that I had warned Paula more urgently!"

In the excitement of the moment he did not notice, that this handwriting was identical with that of the anonymous note he had received.

Folding the letter, he put it into his waist pocket and hastened on. He intended to use it in case of need for the unmasking of the treacherous governess, to whom Paula had given such undeserved love.

With increasing disquietude he flew rather than walked down the steps. Fortunately he soon succeeded in hailing a carriage and in a few minutes reached the appointed place.

At his ringing of the bell, heavy steps drew near. A thick-set man, with fat face and crafty eyes half hidden in his swollen cheeks, inquired his errand. The Count asked for Frau Berger, that being the name mentioned in Emma Waldow's letter.

"She does not live here," was the curt reply, and the old man composedly prepared to close the door.

"Stop," cried the Count in a tone so commanding, that it did not fail in its effect. "If she does not live here, I have a double right to ascertain, who has purposely led me into this error. For I have an appointment with a lady of that name."

"An appointment," repeated the porter and scratched his head irresolutely. "So you are a member and have a card?"

"A member of what?"

"Why, of the Club. The chief entrance is in the next house. It is strictly forbidden to let any one through this door without a card."

The Count felt the blood rush to his head. A frenzied anxiety seized him. And to this place they had enticed his Paula? Heavenly mercy, what was happening to her?

He hastily drew out his purse and pressed a gold piece into the porter's hand.

"Make an exception for me."

This means, so often approved, was succesful in this case.

"All right then, I will venture to do it, though it is against the rule. Will the gentleman please be patient a moment, while I fetch the key to let you in."

With that he vanished into his office.

Adlershorst paced through the narrow corridor with hasty steps. The minutes, which he must wait, seemed to him an eternity. Now it occurred to him, that he had heard much of this Club. It was the assembling place of all the jolly companions of the Capital, who here in a close circle indulged their passion for revelry and gaming. He knew, moreover, that Prince Ottomar was a member of this club. Perhaps it served other objectionable purposes. It certainly had that appearance. And his Paula, his sweet young wife in this suffocating atmosphere of corruption! Oh it could not be imagined, could not be expressed!

"Did you perchance conduct a young lady up here about an hour ago," inquired the Count with trembling lips as he ascended the steps at the porter's side.

"Yes, indeed. And a beautiful young lady, she was blooming and elegant. She came in a carriage with a servant."

"And you did not hold her back as you did me?"

The man assumed an innocent expression.

"I have orders to let the ladies in every time without any questions, but the gentlemen have to show their membership cards."

A cold shudder ran through the Count.

"And do you know, if the lady is still here?"

He forced himself to speak quietly, but his voice trembled.

"I really cannot say," was the answer. "The house has different entrances and exits and I do not concern myself about those going out."

The Count's heart beat almost audibly, as he reached the second floor and stood before the door, which bore the name of Berger. Unable to speak he pointed to it.

His guide nodded with a sly look.

"Really, Sir, a woman of this name does live here, that is, her husband is a servant in the Club, but usually only those go in here, who have the key to the door and others must come through the next house."

Count Adlershorst had to hold on to the wall for support, for a moment everything turned black. But he soon took courage, stepped through the door, which now opened and hastily closed.

He entered a long, brightly lighted corridor with doors to the right and left. In vain he tried to open the one nearest. It was locked. On his knocking all remained quiet, everyone in attendance seemed to have purposely disappeared.

Now he thought he heard a noise still farther within and as he stepped forward the sound of gay voices; laughing and clinking of glasses greeted his ear. Impossible that Paula was there. He was just about to turn around

and try once more to gain an entrance to the closed door, when suddenly one of the great folding doors besides him was pushed open and several officers came out. They were evidently the worse for liquor, for their gait was unsteady, and in their noisy and confused speech not a word was distinguishable. Among the crowd Adlershorst recognized Prince Ottomar. As the Count turned hastily around, Prince Ottomar also recognized him and stepped back involuntarily, but he quickly collected himself. On his wine flushed face came an expression of mingled hate and malicious pleasure.

"Ah, indeed!" he cried stepping up to the Count and speaking thickly. "What a special honor. The highly esteemed Count Adlershorst here in these rooms dedicated to the merry gods of pleasure. What has procured us the pleasure, Count?"

"Nothing, I venture to hope, that concerns Your Highness."

"Ah, a secret! Pardon me." He turned to an officer standing behind him, a immoral man of evil repute. "But tell me, dear Heldborn, has Count Adlershorst then become a member of our Club?"

"I do not know, Your Highness," was the answer.

"Well, my dear Count, we shall have to ask you to leave the house. Our statutes prohibit entrance to anyone not a member.

"Pardon, Your Highness, if notwithstanding this I humbly beg permission to remain a little longer. A lady near to me has on account of a letter (written, I fear, with a bad purpose) come into this house and must be here at the present moment. You will

understand, that it is a case of honor not to leave the house without the lady. The letter, which I have had the good fortune to find, spoke of a Frau Berger."

The companions of the Prince looked on silently and then their eyes fell, not without embarrassment. Prince Ottomar, however, answered sneeringly:

"Do you expect to find your treasure with Frau Berger? You must know, my dear Count, that the ladies, who find entrance there, are not usually considered worthy of the protection of so virtuous a cavalier!"

Adlershorst changed color, his hands gripped the hilt of his sword.

"Your Highness will take back these words, when I tell you, that it is my wife herself, whom I seek here."

A short laugh of the prince, under which the Count quivered, was the only answer.

"What an honor for us, gentlemen," he said turning to the others, "that so beautiful a lady should step into our rooms! Can one of you inform us more particularly concerning her?"

The Count's hands trembled. He gnashed his teeth with rage.

"Your Highness, that is an insult."

Now the others pressed forward striving to appease the excited man.

"Take care, Adlershorst, take care," they whispered in his ear. "Consider with whom you are speaking."

"With whom I am speaking? Unfortunately, I know that only too well," broke in Adlershorst, almost beside himself. "A prince, who misuses the high position which secures him exception from punishment, who with

the help of wretched accomplices has enticed a lady through her youth and inexperience into this house, where at the least, her reputation is imperilled!"

The Prince sprang up, his face flushed. Before those standing near could prevent it, he had drawn his sword and raised it threateningly toward the Count.

"Be silent," he roared. "Have you not learned better discipline in that cursed Felsenschloss? They say that there they cringe before His Majesty in Chinese fashion upon the stomach! Down upon your knees, wretch, and beg for pardon!"

Prince Ottomar seethed with rage, his lips foamed. "Kneel, I say."

For a moment the Count stared at him disconcerted. Then suddenly he turned to go.

"Give way, gentleman," he cried excitedly. "Let me pass or there will be trouble. The Prince is out of his senses."

Mechanically they let him pass, but the Prince had sprung forward and placed himself in the way.

"Not a step farther!"

The Count could control himself no longer, his blade flew from its scabbard, all efforts to separate the antagonists were useless. Then suddenly a further door was pushed open, a loud cry rang out and a slender, dark form enveloped in a silken wrap rushed toward the combatants.

The Count turned.

"Paula!" he cried.

In the same instant however he staggered backward, the Prince's sword had pierced his shoulder.

"Alphonse, Alphonse," lamented Paula, catching her fainting husband in her arms.

The sight of the blood, already visible on the uniform, sobered the Prince. His companions bore the unconscious man into an adjoining room, where a quickly summoned physician bandaged the Count's wound.

The Count soon came to himself, for his unconsciousness was caused more by his agitation than by the loss of blood. Paula sat near him, her hand held his, and tears stood in her eyes. But those eyes shone with as clear and pure a light as ever. A sigh of relief escaped him.

"Away from here, at once," his lips murmured.

In a few moments his wish was fulfilled. The servants carefully placed him in the carriage, and, resting his head on the shoulder of his beloved wife, he rode home.

Chapter XIII.

"Do tell me, tell me all, beloved one! I shall not rest, until I know everything."

Count Adlershorst was lying in his bed, pale but free from fever. The physician, who had just examined the wound closely, had left him with the assurance that no vital part was injured and that he needed nothing but rest and careful nursing to get back his health in a short time. The patient must certainly be quiet for a week and not leave the room. The Count was so overcome by the experiences of the last night, that he calmly accepted this decision, so fatal for him and his hopes. In the confusion of feelings which passed through his

soul, the one which predominated was his anxiety about Paula, about all that, which might have happened to her in that terrible house, in which he had sought and found her. She was sitting at his side, holding his uninjured hand in hers, and her tearful eyes brightened with the assurance of the physician and rested upon the patient with an expression, which visibly calmed his excitement.

"Do not fear for me, Alphonse," she answered. "Did I not tell you before, nothing at all happened to me, which could alarm you."

"Yet, I beg you, to tell me how it happened, that you stepped into the corridor exactly at the moment, that my sword crossed that of the Prince."

"Oh, dearest, I am afraid, that my sudden appearance, my thoughtless cry was the chief cause of your being wounded. You turned toward me and in that moment you were hit by the weapon of the Prince, who himself was frightened. Do not look at me so doubtfully, my dear. As little as I am attached to the Prince, yet I must confess, he turned pale when you fainted and terror was seen on his face."

„You still defend him, Paula."

She blushed. "You are right, he does not deserve it. But still I believe that he is innocent of the whole unhappy occurrence. It will all be explained, as soon as I speak to Emma Waldow. Now hear, how it all happened. The note I received from Emma, you yourself read. That I followed her request, you will understand, as you know how much I think of her, and how great a sympathy I have for this young woman, entirely alone in the world."

"Yes, yes, I know," he agreed somewhat impatiently but with relief.

"As I drove up before the appointed house," Paula went on, "and asked after Frau Berger, whose name Emma had given to me, the porter himself led me up. He told me in the meantime that Frau Berger was the wife of an employ   in the Club house and that she rented the apartment, too large for her needs, to ladies, who had been recommended to her and who were staying for a short time in the Capital. The woman herself received me at the landing very respectfully and modestly. The Forstmeister von Feldau had sent Fr  ulein Waldow to her; she must be very sick, for the doctor, who had examined her in the afternoon and taken over her treatment, had found it necessary to give her a soothing medicine, as her nerves were entirely overworked. Afterwards she had fallen asleep, as the doctor had predicted, and was now resting quietly. As she had been positively told not to disturb her until she should awake, she begged me to wait for a little while. She would go and see whether she was already awake. But you look at me so strangely, Alphonse," she broke off suddenly. "Do let me stop, I beg you, for this excites you so!"

"No, no, go on," said he pressing her hand passionately.

"I shall soon finish. Frau Berger led me into a well-furnished room, in which lay a number of books with engravings and photographs, as is usual in such a pension. She hoped the time would not seem long, and that I would look through these books, till she came back, and so she left me alone. But the time ran on and I saw nothing of Emma Waldow. Impatiently I looked at my watch. I had waited half an hour. Exactly

at nine o'clock the servant would come to take me home; he would soon be here and I had not seen Emma. So I arose to find Frau Berger and to tell her, that if Emma had not yet awakened, I could not wait longer and would rather come another day. But in vain I tried to open here and there a door; they were all locked. Then I began to be alarmed. Listening I thought I heard voices and tried to approach them. There I perceived in the half-dark chamber a paper door and this to my joy yielded to pressure. But now I was still more frightened, for I found myself in a large, splendidly lighted room, whose exquisite furnishing presented a striking contrast to that simple room I had just left. I wanted to return. At this moment a loud medly of voices reached my ear and I thought I heard yours among them. That drove me forward, I did not ask myself how it would be possible, that you, whom I knew to be at Felsenschloss, could suddenly be here, but I felt an unspeakable desire to see you. Then my name was called out: 'Back, back, my lady, you are in the room of the Club.' It was Frau Berger, who, attracted by the noisy quarrelling outside, had come to see me. I did not pay any attention to her, but pushed open the next door. And then I saw all, saw yours and the Prince's swords clash in the gas light. A cry came from my heart, a cry, which became your ruin, my beloved!"

"Not my ruin, my salvation," he called out looking into her eyes with love and pain. "Without you, the Prince instead of me, would be lying upon his bed, and your husband's future would be ruined for ever. Thank a merciful God, that he led you to me and that He held His hand protectingly over us both."

He spoke earnestly, with visible emotion.

"Over me?" she repeated in a low voice. While she had spoken, the consciousness had arisen within her, that she unwittingly had escaped a great, a terrible danger. And her beautiful countenance that till now had gazed so innocently upon her husband, suddenly flushed crimson. The lids sank over the blue eyes and a tremor passed through her body.

"My dear, dear Paula." How soft, how loving his voice sounded.

She hid her head on his shoulder and cried softly.

"It has all turned out right, comfort yourself, my dear, and learn this lesson from it, to be more careful in future in giving your confidence. Have I not warned you of this Emma Waldow?"

"Oh, Alphonse, do you really mean, that she —"

"That she is a miserable woman, about whose actions it is now my duty to inform Forstmeister von Feldau, to save him and his family from such experiences as we have had."

"It cannot be possible," groaned Paula. "Are you sure, that they have not misused her name? Oh, Alphonse, do not condemn her without having heard her! And now, explain to me, how you came to be in that house."

"How? Through the warning of a friend — God bless him for it. Open my note book, Paula, there you will find the letter of Waldow to you and also another note, telling me of the danger which surrounded you."

Paula did as her husband directed. But at the first glance at the address she drew back.

"That is — that too is Emma Waldow's handwriting!"

"Emma Waldow's? That certainly is strange. Are you not mistaken?"

"No, no, compare them yourself, my dear!"

She held the two letters before him. He looked at them a long time.

"There is no doubt of it. She may have had enough feeling to repent, and her repentance may have dictated this letter to me, or — —"

He seemed lost in thoughts. His wife looked at him anxiously.

"Do not think of it any longer. You promised me to remain quiet, as soon as I should tell you what you wished to know. Only on this account did the doctor allow you to talk so long."

He pressed her hand soothingly, but the awakened suspicions would not leave him. His mind seemed to look into an abyss. Without doubt something else was at the bottom of this plot beside the pleasure of a frivolous, love-sick prince.

Paula got up quietly; the Count had closed his eyes. She believed he was sleeping. As she left the room, the servant handed her a card.

"The gentleman has already waited for half an hour in the vestibule; he says, he must speak to the Countess."

Paula looked with surprise at the card, which bore the name George von Randau.

"Show the gentleman into the salon," she said after considering. "I shall be there immediately." —

George's first walk after leaving the railway had been to his parents.

It was Sunday and the church-bells rang brightly and invitingly through the clear winter air. It was certain

that he should find his father at home in his study. He had so often heard from him, that work is prayer and that he must seek to do as much as possible in the short time, which should be granted him for work. His mother on the contrary was an ardent church-goer.

When George entered the hall of his parent's house, he really saw his mother coming down stairs with her prayer-book in her hand. She was a stately matron with still handsome features and the same hopeful eyes as her son George. As soon as she saw him, she cried out joyfully:

"What a surprise, my boy! I will certainly stay at home now. How long a furlough have you from the Forstmeister?"

Mother and son kissed each other tenderly and went up the stairs arm in arm to their apartment on the second floor.

"I must be back this afternoon," answered George. "Important business has called me here to-day. This evening I am going to meet at the Forester's lodge on the lake the Forester Wallburg with the family von Feldau and shall return with them Monday very early to the Jagdschloss, where various necessary things must be done."

In fact George had despatched a messenger directly from the station to the forestry on the lake, to announce his return for that evening, and had sent back the carriage, which he had used.

Professor von Randau laid his work aside immediately, as his wife entered with their son, and while she hastily prepared a warm breakfast for George, who was chilled through by the cold morning ride, father and son seated themselves for a confidential talk.

But before they had reached the most important thing, the reason for George's most unexpected visit, a new guest was announced, Professor Romuald Wallburg, who entered the room with an air of greatest excitement.

"Back from the forestry so soon?" said Professor Randau, stretching out his hand in greeting to his friend.

"Back yesterday evening," was the answer, "and I bless my Creator that I am here. Perhaps I can still do something to advise and to help."

"But where now is your help needed, my dear Wallburg?" cried Herr von Randau, always trying to quiet his easily excited friend. "Calm yourself, I beg you and sit down with us."

Professor Wallburg now noticed as he took a seat, the presence of George.

"So you are here on a visit, dear George?" said he, most agreeably surprised. "What a fortunate circumstance. So you can at once take a report of the last occurrences to the forestry. Heavens! What a blow for my poor father, that now all the plans and hopes are brought to nothing, and Count Adlershorst, our only hope and support lies sick and wounded here in the Capital!"

"Count Adlershorst wounded?" asked father and son at the same time.

"So you know nothing of it? And yet the whole city is full of it. Yesterday evening in the Noble's Club house an encounter took place between Prince Ottomar and the Count; — they say it was on account of the young Countess. The Prince, drunken and excited, drew his sword, the Count did the same and before the other

gentlemen could interfere, the Count was hit by the Prince and fell wounded."

George had turned very pale.

"Oh! I feared it!"

"How? You feared it? So you knew it and are perhaps here on that account?"

George felt he had no right to be silent longer. He told them without reserve what had driven him forth in the snow and storm, how he had not found the Count in Felsenschloss and therefore had hurried here. Only the name of Emma Waldow he believed he must conceal out of consideration for her.

"Such infamous villany!" ejaculated Wallburg quite beside himself. "And what disturbs me the most, that this wretched plot of the Justice has really succeeded. Let us hope to God, that the Count is not dangerously injured, but nevertheless, they will use this affair to undermine his position with the King and will bring about a court martial and he will lose his position for insulting a superior and be sentenced to, God knows what, for attacking one of the royal blood! The King is again alone, his best friend taken from him, he is entirely in the hands of that cowardly band, who strive to destroy him. Oh, that heaven would throw its lightning on these wretched creatures to make them powerless! — They gossip and groan and complain, but when it comes to deeds, they draw back. What have I not been obliged to hear to-day? The faithful ones, I mean those whom we call faithful, that is the honest people, pity the Count, it is true, and talk severely about the frivolous Prince, the fast man, the lover of women, who has always been an offense to the world, but at the same time, they add

shrugging their shoulders — why did Count Adlershorst marry into the family of Baron Ebersdorf? He should have foreseen conflicts. And whether the charming Paula is entirely innocent in this scandal, certainly she was present at this encounter — whether she is really innocent, is not easy to proof!"

"Oh, she is innocent, perfectly innocent!" George interfered passionately.

"Surely, surely, I have never doubted it," Wallburg continued, "but the world is more willing to believe evil than good, and those, who wish to find fault with our King, speak hatefully. They pretend the deepest moral indignation and complain pathetically over the attack against the respectability of the princely house. Everything must totter in a state, if an officer sets such an example of insubordination, and shows so little respect for the royal blood.

Certain it is that the favorite of His Majesty apparently believed that he could take any liberty, and just here the full severity of law must be carried out, the people must be shown that we do not live, as the King thinks, in oriental conditions, but in a state of justice, where even the highest are bound to respect the laws."

Romuald Wallburg ran his hands hastily through his hair with a disturbed air.

"What is to be done?" he called out after a short pause, looking up in desperation at the two Randaus; "I know no help." The old Randau interrupted comfortingly: "The King is still master in the land, and will surely not desert the Count in these threatening

circumstances. Therefore the most important thing seems to me, to inform the King of what has happened."

"But how?" Wallburg asked. "No message comes safely into the King's hand, since the Count's eyes do not watch over the Castle. And then — all these are but rumours; who knows the whole truth?"

"This, I hope, to find out," exclaimed George hastily, getting up from his seat. "I shall have it from the Count himself, or if he is not to be seen, from the Countess, who under the present circumstances will not refuse to receive me."

"Good, good, my boy. That is a clever idea," called Wallburg, and putting his hand upon the shoulder of his favourite, said: "Do not lose another moment."

"But, dearest Professor, you certainly will allow him to take a little soup," said the friendly voice of George's mother at this moment, opening the door of the dining-room. "And you, dear Professor, show us the honour of partaking of our simple meal."

This could not be refused. But George felt restless, and to the regret of his mother he only tasted her good dishes and hurried away.

Soon he was sitting in the salon of the Countess, opposite Paula, and revealed to her all that he knew from Emma Waldow, her guilt, her regret, and his intercession for her must have been very warm, for there were tears in Paula's eyes and she spoke, after he had finished, the same words, which had broken forth from his lips after the confession of the unhappy girl: "Poor child, how I pity you!"

But a still more important thing must be considered. "I do not know," said Paula hesitatingly, "whether I

could disturb my husband again after the many excitements of these last hours without endangering his recovery, and yet, perhaps he would never forgive me, if I should spare him at a time, where so much is at stake."

"Dare it any way, Countess," suggested George, "for he alone is able to advise us."

"I will go to him," she replied earnestly. "Wait here a moment, Herr von Randau; I hope my husband will be able to speak to you personally."

How becoming this decided firmness was to the sweet young face! Full of admiration, George looked at this slender, fairy-like figure. How splendidly she had developed in this short time at the side of this noble man.

After a few minutes he was called into the sick-room. Count Adlershorst greeted him from his sick-bed with a look of gratitude.

His wife rose from a seat at his side and offered it to George.

"What a happiness, that you are not held back by false reserve," said the Count with a weak but distinct voice. "You have rendered me a great service by these disclosures; I imagined that I had fallen a victim to a miserable intrigue, now I know it and am able to make plans accordingly. I beg you, Herr von Randau, be so good, as to go at once from here to His Majesty. Do all that you can in spite of my absence to induce the Monarch to the immediate carrying out of the planned removal to the Capital. It is, I know, no light mission, but for the sake of the cause, which you serve, I hope that you will undertake it. As I cannot write myself, my wife will give a letter to you,

which I am convinced, will open without delay the doors of the Castle to you."

"Count," replied George warmly, "your confidence honours me greatly. I repeat, what was once my privilege in Gundersbach to say to you: My life belongs to the King. All that lies in my power to carry out your message, shall be done."

"May God give you success," sighed the Count, "and remember that I wait here with painful expectation for the coming of the King. For myself I have no anxiety. Whatever punishment they may think fit for me, I will bear patiently, if I can only know my beloved master out of danger."

And reaching his uninjured hand to George he added: "I beg you to wait a moment in the salon; the letter shall be given to you immediately."

When George, fifteen minutes later left the Count's house, he met on the stair Baroness Ebersdorf, who came to pay a visit to the sick one. Her black eyes shone glitteringly in her pale, yellowish face. She looked at George with surprise, then passed on with a silent bow.

Chapter XIV.

Duke Ferdinand walked excitedly up and down his room. His brow was clouded with indignation and his eyes flashed with anger as he looked at the Prince, who with an annoyed air was leaning in the window-embrasure.

"That you must now, exactly at this time, commit

such folly," ejaculated the Duke. "Your incorrigible frivolity makes everything uncertain. The prestige of our house is injured by your recklessness. My daughter-in-law, Princess Henry, has expressed the greatest displeasure on account of this. She values very highly the young Countess Adlershorst and cannot understand, how you could choose her, an innocent woman like her, for your tricks!"

"But, my dear uncle," said Prince Ottmar, excusing himself, "by Jove, you take the affair harder than it is. What has happened after all? I swear that I had not even seen this charming little Countess in the questionable house, much less spoken to her, when I met her husband, at a very unfortunate time, you must admit. And then, is it my fault, that Countess Adlershorst has friends in the ill-reputed Pension Berger and that she goes there to see them?"

"Forbear, I beg you, to excuse yourself to me," answered the Duke brusquely. "I know all. She had been enticed into this house by a forged letter."

"I know nothing of that," insisted the Prince. "Certainly, I was told that she would be there, and I confess that it was my intention to make use of the good chance, to try to speak to her."

"And who arranged this chance, if I may be allowed to ask? I will not take it for granted, that our too zealous friend, Herr von Gleichen, had a hand in the matter! If he goes such ways, I shall not follow him further, that you may repeat to him."

The Prince embarrassed, stroked his moustache.

"It would be certainly better, that you should speak to the gentleman yourself. He accompanied me here

and waits in the antechamber for an audience, which you may graciously grant him."

"So? So you have brought your advocate with you? I hope, however, that this tricky gentleman will not dare to excuse such unheard-of proceedings, for in my eyes there is no excuse."

The Prince did not answer this renewed outbreak of the Duke's anger, but glad to escape so easily, hastened out of the room.

Indeed he did not feel at all sure of the consequences, which might follow this unfortunate adventure as long as this King held the reins of the government in his hands, this King whom he hated, because he at one time had reproved him as a good-for-nothing fellow on account of his youthful excesses and had banished him from the Capital. From him he could not expect indulgence. But he trusted to the skill of the Justice von Gleichen, who had promised to arrange this affair with the Duke, and as far as the King was concerned, had spoken of allies, who would be able to prevent the royal indignation from having a lasting effect.

Hastily he pressed the Justice's hand in the antechamber.

"He is greatly annoyed. Be prepared for the most severe sermon. And do not forget, that you promised to bring me safely through under all circumstances."

The Justice looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"I shall do my best."

With a humble and respectful manner he stepped a few minutes later into the reception-room of the Duke, who received him with undisguised coldness.

"Prince Ottomar directed me to you, to get a truthful

explanation of the painful events which occurred at the Club."

And as the lawyer did not immediately answer, he turned to him imperiously: "Or is it you yourself, who is the author of the falsification, which brought about the meeting of Count Adlershorst with the Prince?"

"Your Highness judges me too quickly. If you will have the grace to hear me —"

"So you admit, that it is so," interrupted the Duke passionately; "then there is nothing more to say, for me, there is no excuse for such things. I am a soldier, who goes straight ways. Intrigues of that kind I abhor. Their nature is to make mischief and push us farther from the goal."

And before the Justice could say another word, the Duke turned his back to him. He was dismissed, dismissed in full disgrace. Yet he did not seem as surprised, as one might have expected.

At the door of the Castle, he hailed a cab and ordered to be taken to the residence of Minister von Feldheim, where he was expected. In the early morning the minister had invited him by a personal note to his house, as it had become his habit in difficult questions, to ask the advice of this clever and experienced man.

Herr von Feldheim showed him a troubled countenance.

"Do you know, what I have heard as authentic from the Royal Castle?" called he to the entering guest, pointing to a seat near his desk. „That His Majesty is expected here to-day."

The Justice nodded. "I have also heard so, and intended to inform your Excellency."

The minister sank back in his chair, and pressed his hands together in despair.

"That means for all of us, who hope to make an end of the mismanagement on the throne a defeat, from which we shall hardly recover. What have you accomplished by that disgusting meeting, which you arranged at the Club, Herr von Gleichen?"

"At least this much, Your Excellency," was the answer given with a smile, "that Count Adlershorst for a time is separated from His Majesty."

"I believe on the contrary that the Count's accident has hastened the King's coming, as His Majesty wishes to be near his dear friend in this time of need."

There was a strongly sarcastic tone in the minister's words.

"Your Excellency is mistaken," remarked the Justice. "His Majesty would have been here already, if the Count had not been detained by his wounds."

"How so?" said the minister.

"Everything was ready for the removal from Felsen-schloss, as, at my instigation, the letter was given to the Count, which decided him to come on in advance. On that account the King postponed his journey till the return of his adjutant."

The minister shrugged his shoulders.

"For a few days — what will that amount to?"

"Forever, perhaps, if this occurrence is well used —"

"I do not understand you, dear Justice — explain yourself more clearly —"

The lawyer bent his head nearer to the minister. "The Count at all events has made himself punishable by attack upon a prince of the Royal House."

"Certainly — but the Duke will abstain — I am sure of that, from any punishment of the Count — at least from a military point of view, as he is excited to the highest degree by Prince Ottmar's behaviour. On the contrary, very probably the King will call the Prince to account."

"That must be avoided, at any cost," the lawyer interrupted.

"How can you hinder that, if the King himself comes here? As I know His Majesty, if once he gives up his seclusion, he will proceed sharply and then woe to us all who have stood on the side of the opposition —"

"Therefore it seems to me most important to take care that His Majesty shall not come here."

"Yes, if you could accomplish that," sighed the minister; "but that is impossible. This very night the King leaves the Felsenschloss."

"But it is a long way from there to the Capital," smiled the guest. "You can send a messenger to the Seeschloss, where the King intends to take breakfast tomorrow early — Your Excellency must admit that I am well informed — a messenger, who would induce the Monarch to give up his journey."

"Give up his journey — and for what reason —?"

"In his own interest, first of all — as the excitement of the people has become intense since the official proclamation of the physicians about the King's health."

"Impossible," ejaculated the minister, "no one will undertake to face His Majesty with such a report!"

"I know someone, who would be ready to do it, and who would carry out the mission with delicacy and

courtesy. He would be introduced simply as a mediator in the affair of Count Adlershorst and could express to His Majesty the readiness of His Highness, the Duke, to abstain from any proceedings on his side against the Count, if His Majesty in the same manner would be ready, out of consideration for the Royal family, to let the matter die out without calling attention to it."

The minister got up and walked up and down his room nervously.

"And who is it," he asked after a short pause, "who would be ready to carry out this extremely difficult mission?"

"Count Goldberg."

The minister stopped as if transfixed before the Justice.

"Count Goldberg! The former friend and confidant of the King, he would —"

"Out of friendship for His Majesty, Your Excellency, he has put himself at our disposition. He, better than anyone else, knows the peculiarities and the sensitive feelings of His Majesty and will therefore know best how far to go with his communication."

"Ah ha! an aspirant!", put in the minister, "who is thirsty to assure himself of the thanks of the future powers! I declare I consider the whole affair very repulsive. At the same time I admit, that one cannot be too scrupulous with the means, where it concerns a great end. Tell the Count that I desire a visit from him."

He reached out his hand, as if wishing to close the interview, and the Justice retired with a smile of triumph on his lips. He had again won a victory, and soon the power of the King need not be feared.

The minister walked up and down his room thoroughly dissatisfied. It pained his sense of justice to be obliged to go through side doors, while he preferred to go straight ahead without disguise. But a politician cannot be weak, where so much, where all is at stake! By Jove! he would do differently, if he could, if the King's obstinacy should not force him to violence, which in the depths of his soul he abhorred.

But the King was sick. He was not accountable for his actions. The conference of the physicians had declared that without doubt. Why then this hesitation? Somewhat relieved he took a long breath, as if he would throw this weight from his breast. But in vain, the weight remained, a weight of responsibility toward Him, who would once demand an account from him as to whether he had misused the powers which fate had given into his hand.

Chapter XV.

A winter's night with a full moon over the mountains! He who knows its magic can understand the charm of a midnight's sleighride under the silent trees, amid the silver veiled mountain-tops. There dashing along in the moonlight comes a golden shell, brilliant outriders in front of it. It is the King, speeding on to his Capital. From the dashboard rises the figure of Fortuna, holding in her uplifted hand a wreath of victory over the dashing horses, which hardly touch ground with their nimble feet. The riders are lost now in the shade of the fir trees, whose powerful trunks rise silently on both sides. The goodess now wrapped in darkness, now bathed in moon-

light, appears and disappears in the changing light, ever stretching forth her offered wreath, an everlasting change.

"Thus my life," thought the King, "an unending change of light and shade, only the shade has prevailed. Is my life over? Is it mine still? Or has the end come? Can the future not bring me her wreath, her golden wreath of victory, — as Fortuna here holds it before me? A voice within me answers No. To use life as it ought to be used — to create flowers and fruit — is no more in my power. The world has grown strange to me, and I to it. Is it my mistake? It may be. But still more the fault of those, who have pushed my young soul, thirsting for friendship and confidence, into this loneliness. Now again, duty calls me back, back to the struggle of life, to the turbulent masses and to the world of wild and impure passions of the great city. I follow this call for a friend's sake, for the only friend, whom I still call mine, and because he is mine, they have stretched out their hands to destroy him." At this thought the King straightens up, he clenches his fist. He is informed of everything by George. The contemptible plot, aimed first of all to humiliate him, lies open before him. "Still I am King," he whispers to himself. "Still the power is mine to protect what is dear to me, and like Zeus, I can still scatter the lightning among the miserable crowd, eager to destroy my idol. Still am I King. But how long will it last? Will the people really receive me joyfully as my friends wish me to believe, or will they gaze at me as at a monster, as my fears foretell? At no time could I endure the devotion of the unthinking crowd, crying to-day 'Hosanna' and to-morrow 'crucify him'. I covet the affection of reasonable men and the supreme satis-

faction of being valued for my own work. If I had been like other rulers, other leaders of mankind! Could I have been able to intoxicate myself with the homage rendered a sovereign, or could I have found pleasure in those cheap entertainments, where roses are plucked to-day and thrown away to-morrow —, could I have yielded to the guidance of the hands outstretched to me — — if! — But I have been independent from my birth. To think for myself, to explore for myself, was my desire. I could not see the universe through the glasses of others. Now it is too late — too late."

He buried his head in his hands. Night was fighting already with day, the dawn glowed in the East. In the midst of the snow plain glistened the lake, whose borders were frozen, but whose inner surface was free from ice. And now arose in the first pale light of day the castle behind the bare trees of the park. Here the King was expected to take breakfast.

A shiver run through his body. What memories, what painful memories of this place, which he had wished to avoid! These walls had seen his highest happiness and his bitterest pain. Here had passed his childhood, when not altogether happy, yet pleasant. Perhaps too heavily had the father's hand been laid upon the sensitive royal child. And yet childhood had been a blessed time! Blessed in the almost passionate zeal of learning, blessed in the enjoyment of nature, which always had for him a special language. Then his father, the severe and yet so deeply beloved father had gone, too early,—yes, much too early for the son, summoned to the throne in his delicate youth, and this first deep and over-

whelming pain had stirred his soul to its very depths. Then came the beautiful time of the first years of reign, the time where the young King struggled to live up to his ideals; — even though this time was not untouched by envy. For even then they began to be dissatisfied with his tendencies, to scorn him, as he chose a way different from the common one. Still this did not disturb his serenity, he was King and believed in his power to bend all resistance to his will. Oh madness! His was the will that must yield. Some trifled with him, others took advantage of his faith in mankind to deceive him. From all sides weapons were aimed at him, to wound him, to take from his heart love and friendship. How deeply the treachery of his first love had wounded him! Then she came into his life, the sweet creature, whose tender devotion had made up for the grief his young life had suffered. How happy he had been! Happy in the highest sense of the word! How few can say this? How few are capable of experiencing this depth of love! A moment only, his happiness had lasted. It had passed as a dream. Both his friend and his beloved had been torn from his side, and with them peace had gone from his soul for ever. The King covered his eyes with his hand, the shadow of the departed ones seemed gliding before him. "Reinhard! Franciska! You have found it, the peace I long for," he murmured, "oh! to join you!"

The sleigh stopped. A stranger received the monarch at the threshold of his castle. The old castellan Laue had passed away a year before. In the family rooms, furnished by the King's own taste and deserted for so long a time, the lunch table was set.

The servant Lippert, who had gone ahead, hurried to receive his master's coat and to give him the little attentions he knew he liked. There was a certain uneasiness in the old man's face; a sure indication that he had unwelcome news to report. The pressing thoughts which had engrossed the King during his long ride, made him at first inattentive. But he soon observed the old servant's restlessness.

"What is it, Lippert?" he asked.

"Your Majesty," the servant replied promptly and directly as he knew his master liked that best. "Count Goldberg arrived here yesterday evening with a message from His Highness, Duke Ferdinand."

The King started up. "Even here I am not safe from an invasion! I do not wish to see him, I cannot see him—"

"Pardon, Your Majesty," the old man replied, "the affair which brings him here relates to Count Adlershorst, as he himself said to me."

The King frowned and struggled to control his repulsion. At last he said:

"He may wait in my study. But he must be brief — I do not purpose to stay here long."

The thought flashed through his mind — could Adlershorst be worse, could he be dead? Why might this not be? Fate had been cruel to him, had taken from him what he had treasured and loved. This idea made him restless and drew him from the lunch table sooner than usual.

His beautiful countenance twitched nervously, as a few minutes later he entered his study. This was the same room from whose window he had once in scorn thrown into the courtyard below the marble bust of his

treacherous fiancée. Here at the same place stood Count Goldberg, his former friend, to whom for so many years he had given his fullest confidence. The King had at first been attracted by the musical gifts and artistic capability of the young man whom he now knew to be unfaithful and untrue, seeking always his own advantage.

The appearance of the Count was as ever most elegant, his bow most respectful, but the King's fine senses perceived immediately that he was here on a trying mission. The handsome though not very expressive features of the Count were remarkably tense.

"You come to deliver a message from his Highness my uncle, Duke Ferdinand?" said the King inviting him by a motion of the hand to sit, while he chose for himself a seat bringing his face into shadow. He could not endure to be gazed at by watchful eyes. The Count obeyed and began immediately to deliver the well-prepared speech entrusted to him, to bring about the reconciliation between Prince Ottmar and Count Adlershorst. The King listened attentively.

"I thank His Highness sincerely for his kind intention," he replied. "But it is not possible for me to entirely agree with him. It is best to open bad ulcers, to prevent the disease spreading."

The Count coughed a little.

"May Your Majesty graciously consider, that an exalted princely name would be greatly compromised."

"Not without reason," the King interrupted.

"Certainly not quite without reason," the Count replied. "But it concerns the honour of a woman, upon whom a shadow must fall. . . It is not to be denied, that she was in this questionable house."

The King raised his hand in protest.

"No more of that. You know as well as I do, Count Goldberg, that the lady is innocent and that it would be an easy thing, to expose this web of intrigue. It is finely woven; but not fine enough to not be able to be seen through."

The Count drew back. The King was better informed than he had believed. So he had to play on another string.

"After all — it would be advisable out of consideration for Count Adlershorst, to spare him further excitement. His Highness the Duke could not refuse the proceedings of the court martial against him in case the matter should be followed up."

The King was silent for a while.

"I ask for absolute frankness, dear Count," he began again. You have probably not come in the night from the Capital to this castle, and so to speak, captured me here, simply to get my consent to this."

Again the Count started. Still, in spite of the undeniably sick condition of the King, this uncomfortable power of observation and this sudden and wonderful perception of truth! He could not conceal a certain embarrassment at this unexpected question, but — nevertheless, if frankness be demanded, he will dare it. Perhaps it may best serve his cause.

"Your Majesty demands frankness. Good, so must Your Majesty pardon me, if what I have to say, should prove somewhat unwelcome."

The King's brow darkened; but with a motion of his hand he bade him to go on.

"Sire," the Count continued in a lower voice, "I

do not deny that, besides this official commission, the secret which led me here, is to keep Your Majesty from the continuation of the journey."

"Ah, I thought it," ejaculated the King with a bitter laugh. "However firmly I am convinced of the good intention that leads you, my dear Count, I must abide by my decision. In a few hours I shall be in the Capital."

The King arose, his face was deeply reddened; apparently he was in great excitement.

The Count also rose quickly from his seat.

"I must assume then, that Your Majesty does not know, how severe the consequences of a public appearance would be for you; only the most sanguine ignorance could have advised it at this moment."

"Not ignorance, Count Goldberg, but friendship," interrupted the King vehemently, while the hot blood beat violently in his temples; "the malice of my foes speaks through you."

The Count bent his head involuntarily, as if bowed down under the weight of this accusation.

Indeed he did not find the courage, to look the King in the eyes, the same eyes which had often gazed on him with loving friendship and which now glanced at him so threateningly.

"Your Majesty may consider me a foe. I receive this heavy accusation from your mouth, quite undeserved, but with all devotion. But I assure you, that nothing but respect, highest respect and love for Your Majesty would induce me to repeat my request. Your Majesty does not imagine what —"

He stopped suddenly. The King grasped violently the back of his chair.

"What the vicious have conceived against me?" supplied he; "you are mistaken. I know all. The family council has declared me unfit to reign."

"And Your Majesty also knows the reasons?"

"The reasons?" The King's hand upon the chair began to tremble.

"Yes, I think, I know them, Count Goldberg. In spite of it I beg you to report to my uncle, the Duke, that I am not willing to give up my intention. Still I am the master and ruler of my land and I hope to remain so for a long time, as my physical strength seems to promise me a long life.

"God keep Your Majesty," the Count replied, lifting his hand in a theatrical manner. "Who would wish that more sincerely than Your Majesty's exalted uncle, his loyal subject. But on account of preserving, or indeed the recovering of Your Majesty's precious health, they believe it desirable to free Your Majesty for a time from the excitement and the cares of ruling and to place Your Majesty under medical treatment. —"

"Medical treatment?" The veins on the King's brow swelled with indignation. "What does this mean? I am well, perfectly well!"

The Count bowed in respectful submission.

"May it be so," continued he in a repressed tone, which spoke clearly enough his inner confusion. But it was of the highest importance for his future to keep his promise, to prevent the King from coming to the Capital. So he took new courage.

"I am sorry to say, that the Commission of doctors called together by the Royal family have been forced to decide otherwise."

The King changed colour. A deadly pallor covered his face.

"What? They will — they dare without having seen me — to declare me ill — indeed they dare to —"

The King's lips would not utter the terrible word, which meant destruction for him. The chair fell crashing to the ground, he tottered. Count Goldberg hastened to him, to preserve the prince from the fall. In vain. The King sank down, his head striking against a piece of furniture. Terrified, the Count rushed to the bell. On no account let the appearance of blame fall on him, in case the King, whom all knew to be subject to hemorrhages, should pass away.

Lippert rushed in hastily and stood with trembling knees at the side of the motionless figure of his beloved master.

Fortunately the King's physician was not far off. A carriage was sent after him immediately, he came in time, to assure the departing Count, that nothing more serious had happened than a light bruise on the head, which would be healed in a few days.

In fact the Monarch soon recovered his consciousness and spoke perfectly composedly. When his surgeon asked him, whether His Majesty would order to have the Seeschloss arranged for a longer sojourn, until his complete recovery, the King answered with a decided No.

"I should not, on any account, stay here. It seems to me, as if I could not breathe, as if death was lurking for me within these walls."

"The wound is not at all so serious as to prevent Your Majesty from the journey to the Capital," said the physician.

Again the King shook his head decidedly.

"To the Capital—now? never again! There is only one place for me, where I can recover, where I can find myself again, so back to my beloved mountains and that at once!"

His orders were carried out, and the evening of the same day, the sick King was taken to his lonely castle in the mountains.

Chapter XVI.

After an unusually hard winter an early spring with its warm breath had awakened nature from her winter sleep and covered the landscape with a dainty green. The King's Swiss Chalet above Gundersbach, which had for years been occupied only by the keeper, stood again with wide open doors and windows, looking from its sharp rocky heights to the broad, lovely valley before it. About a month ago, the adjutant of the King, Count Adlershorst and his wife had moved in here. It was at the special request of the monarch in order to be as near as possible to His Majesty, and at the same time, to take advantage of the mountain air for his recovery.

The afternoon sun painted countless rainbows in the fountain on the terrace; the sparkling water lay in a thousand pearls on the beautiful azaleas from the royal hothouses, which surrounded the marble basin. The lilac buds were still closed, but the tulips, mignonette and violets had opened fully in the beds, and at a sheltered place a magnolia tree, this lovely transplanted child of the South, unfolded its white chalices.

Countess Adlershorst stepped from the door of the salon, which opened upon the terrace. A large straw hat sheltered her from the sun. She walked quickly over the terrace to the landing, where for a moment she stood, fascinated by the picture before her. Just at her feet lay Gundersbach, its numerous villas and summer residences surrounded by the first green of spring. Her eyes followed the current of the clear mountain brook, which took its serpentine way through luxurious green meadows to a rocky gorge, where it disappeared in a sudden fall. This was the same mountain-stream which passed her father's home, and by which she so often had stood in the former summer at the side of her fiancé, listening in quiet happiness to the fall of its waters.

What an innocent, happy child she was then — but now! A deep sigh escaped her. How suddenly was the veil of innocence, faith and confidence, through which she had looked at the world, torn away. The brightness of life had been dimmed, since the terrible hour when she had received her wounded husband in her arms. A young heart resents the ruin of its ideals, and what resignation teaches it in later years to accept patiently, seems to the young impossible to be borne. And yet, how rich she was after all! Her husband, who in spite of the rapid healing of his wound had fallen into a nervous fever in consequence of the great excitement he had gone through, had recovered under her good care, and also the dreaded result of the affair with Prince Ottomar, the court martial proceedings, had been suppressed. And more than all! The tie of love between the young couple had become closer through the common suffering.

Paula had developed mentally. She was able to understand much better all the cares which darkened her husband's brow, and to help him bear them. At the same time many things within her were disturbed for ever. Some who had been dear to her up to this time, were strangers and separated from her by a great gulf. Certainly she had forgiven her once so beloved governess, who had been forced to sin against her, but her confidence in Emma Waldow was gone for ever. Indeed she had never been very strongly attached to her father, but a child's feeling permitted her, to overlook his weakness. Now she felt with pain that he was only a tool in the hands of others, and she suffered to know that she could not even respect the one to whom she naturally should look up. Towards her step-mother, moreover, from whom she always had withdrawn, she felt now an uncontrollable repugnance. What a base ugly soul in this beautiful, richly gifted woman! Paula now knew Ludmilla's past, she looked into the abysses of a life, which through selfishness had lost a woman's modesty and pureness, and in its inconsiderate demand for happiness had brought misery to herself and others.

In the wild struggle for mastery she had become the slave of a strange will, for she was entirely under the domination of the Justice von Gleichen, the bitterest enemy of the King, to whom this high-minded, noble monarch was an obstacle between him and the goal, toward which he and his party aspired. A brutal fighter, who had not spared even the daughter of the house, into which he came as friend, and who had used as a tool Emma Waldow, whose education the Queen

had entrusted to him, and brought her to be the unhappy creature, who now in the consciousness of truth was the prey of her own remorse. And beside this, there rose before her inner vision the picture of the lonely King, living far from the world, over whose head the threatening clouds gathered out of which any moment the lightning could descend, which would destroy him, him and perhaps all those whom he loved, who remained true to him. The young woman had left the terrace and followed a steep path bordered by majestic firs, which led down into the valley. Soon the sound of an approaching horse came to her ear, a happy smile lightened up her thoughtful features, and waving her handkerchief to the coming rider, she cried joyfully:

"At last, at last, Alphonse! How long you have made me wait to-day!"

He sprang from his horse, threw the bridle over his arm and walked by her side to the house.

She looked tenderly into his face, which was clouded with care.

"I hope nothing especial has happened," she asked, "to make you so late to-day?"

"Nothing unusual," he replied; "even though it is bad enough."

"How is the King? Have you seen him?"

"Not to-day. You know, I must go back this evening. His Majesty has ordered a mass in the chapel, at which Mozart's Requiem shall be performed."

"With artists from the Capital, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly. Among them Frau Eva, who has offered her services. I think you would better go with

me to-day. The King has made an exception and allows free entrance to all to-day. The Feldaus will be there, I hear."

"Mozarts Requiem!" Paula exclaimed, "how strange! I thought that the King did not care for Mozart."

"The King is too great a musician for that," the Count objected. "He has certainly always valued this great master of tone though not preferring him, because he considered Reinhardt's creation the highest in art."

"But just the Requiem!" Paula repeated; "will it not depress him still more? And he needs so much courage, so much strength."

A deep sigh was the only answer of the Count. He passed his hand over his brow, as if he would drive away tormenting thoughts.

"Yes, courage and strength, if he could only find them," he said earnestly. "But oh! he has been too deeply wounded with their awful weapons. Since Count Goldberg carried out his hellish work and told him to his face what even the simplest man would have kept from him, since then, the King's spirit is destroyed. The fatal question never leaves him: 'Is it true, what the physicians have said about me? Am I ill without knowing it?' Only for a moment does he succeed in freeing himself from the persecuting thought. — Suddenly in the middle of a conversation this terror comes over his countenance. Then he casts an anxious look around, as if he were persecuted by demons. Yes, a short time ago he suddenly grasped my arm and broke forth: 'Adlershorst, you are my friend, I demand the truth of you. What do you think of my condition?' — Your Majesty, I replied, you make yourself ill, because you

do not trust your health. He sighed. 'Yes, that is it, I have no faith in myself and that ruins me.'

"Oh Alphonse," Paula exclaimed, "what will be the end of this?"

"What will be the end?" the Count repeated. "My only hope is, that in the hour of danger the lost courage will come back again to our noble master. What I am able to do, to inspire him, I do. Whether I shall succeed —"

"Oh let us hope for it!" The young woman pressed his arm, through which she had slipped her own, anxiously.

They had now reached the cottage. A stable boy hurried up, to take the horse from the Count. He gave his arm to his wife and stepped into the cheerful dining hall, where the table was set. The sun filled the room with its cheerful beams, the birds sang in the branches, the fountain played so joyfully; everything seemed as if made for the happiness of the young couple, but they sat opposite each other, silent and sad — both drawn into a strange and tragic fate. But this fate was that of their King and benefactor, and to the human sympathy which every great misery calls forth, was added that which the fall of the great arouses in every sympathetic nature.

The Count, who spent nearly every night with the King at Felsenschloss to cheer his restless pain, withdrew for a short rest to his room, while his wife chose a seat on the terrace with some fancy-work in her hand.

Soon her eyes wandered from her work to the valley, where she noticed to her surprise an elegant carriage drawn by two beautiful horses, coming up the hill. She recognized the light livery of coachman and servant. The

lady in the carriage could be no one but her stepmother. But what brought her here just now? Paula sprang up excitedly. Did the clever woman of the world not comprehend that her behaviour had sundered everything between her and her step-daughter? During the eight days since Baron Ebersdorf had moved into his villa at Gundersbach, Paula had been there only once, and then she had shown plainly, that she came simply on her father's account. Now her step-mother sought her out in her retirement, perhaps with the hope of getting some news from her.

In spite of all inner disdain she could not avoid receiving the unwelcome guest: after all she was her father's wife, and she owed some respect to her, if only for the sake of the servants.

Contrary to her custom the Baroness appeared in a simple dark suit, wearing a thick veil which she now threw back. After giving her coat to the footman, she followed the Countess into the parlour. Once here Paula noticed how changed, how altered was the former beauty of the still much admired woman. Her eyes had a restless feverish look, her cheeks wan and sallow.

"Is the Count at home?" Ludmilla asked taking a seat opposite to her daughter on the divan.

"He is at home, but has retired for a short time to rest. His service at the castle is very trying at present."

Ludmilla dropped her eyelids, her hand played nervously with a black fan, which she opened and closed hastily.

"I have a request to make of him, of both of you," she said without lifting her eyes.

"I suppose you will drive over to Felsenschloss to the performance of the Requiem. I should like to go with you."

"You!" Paula found no further words to reply. Perfectly aghast she stared at the woman before her. The Baroness throw a quick glance towards her step-daughter and went on with a forced smile:

"You do not seem very encouraging. I understand this. But in spite of it, I repeat my request. It is my heart's desire, to hear the Requiem and with you two."

"With us? But why? The chapel of the castle is open to everyone as my husband has told me."

"Yes, to everyone, so I have heard. But I know that the people are greatly excited; they might recognize me and the protection of Count Adlershorst would be valuable to me."

Paula bit her lips in rising anger.

"Under the present circumstances you would better give up the Requiem. And too I do not know, if my husband would be willing to be your protector."

A frown appeared on Ludmilla's face.

"Your words are very hard!" she said and her deep voice faltered as if in repressed pain, "but you would judge more mildly, if you knew all."

"I do know all."

Ludmilla got up. Her dark eye gazed passionately on the delicate face of the young woman.

"And if what you know be false?"

"It cannot be false; for all I see confirms it. You will not demand me to repeat, what would be embarrassing for you and for me."

"So you take me for the King's most bitter enemy?"

Paula bent her head in silent answer.

"And you are right," Ludmilla cried passionately.

"Yes, I am his foe, his most serious adversary. I have bent myself to destroy him, to humiliate his proud soul. And yet it may seem inexplicable to you — but it is true, I have an ardent desire, to see him once more, once more —"

"Is it to assure yourself of his woe?"

Ludmilla shrank at this accusation, cast at her in noble scorn.

"You are woman, you love and yet you can believe that of a woman?"

"You speak of love, mother! Have you ever known any love but for yourself?"

"Yes, I have known it!" Ludmilla ejaculated and straightened up with flaming eyes.

"I have known love, as you do not know it, and never will know it. I have loved with all my soul, with the whole truth of my nature. But he, who could have made of me whatever he wanted, for whose sake I was ready to sacrifice splendour, position and honour — he pushed me away. And this loved one — was the King!"

Paula turned aside.

"I have heard this," she replied coldly, refusing this undesired confidence, "and because he could not return your love, because he preferred another to you, you have followed him with your hate."

"And yet I have always loved him."

"Do not be blasphemous," Paula interrupted her, "one does not destroy what one loves."

Ludmilla moved her hand protestingly.

"Do not judge, child. What does your dovelike

soul know of real, hot passion? Other blood flows in my veins than in yours! You have the power to love, but not to hate, you do not know the torturing delight of preparing suffering for him, whose hand has made you suffer. Yes, I do hate the King! I will see him destroyed and I rejoice, that I, the scorned one, have contributed to his fall. And I love him still to-day with the same passion as when I sank trembling in happiness on his breast, — on this breast, which already held another ideal! And if he would come to me to-day and would speak to me: "Save me by the power of your love, raise me out of the night, into which you have helped to push me" — I should still press him to my heart full of devotion, the throneless King, the sick man, and devote my days to his comfort and to his welfare!"

Paula shuddered. Her soul looked for the first time into the depths of impure passion.

"No more, no further," cried she with a gesture of pain, "what you say is madness."

"Take it for that, but have pity on me, let me see once more with my earthly eyes, the one whose picture has filled my life. I must die, if I can never again see this beautiful, beloved countenance!"

She sank down, stretched her hand appealingly to Paula, while hot tears streamed from her eyes.

"For God's sake, control yourself," trembled Paula in excitement at this outbreak. With a breath of relief she added: "Here comes my husband."

Still Ludmilla breathed heavily, but she sought to compose herself.

At the first glimpse of her Count Adlershorst was aware, that something unusual must have happened,

and turned anxiously to Paula, to hear what it was and whether her father had fallen ill.

Paula blushed deeply. Her serene soul felt full of shame at the humiliation of the woman, who had abased herself so deeply before her. Her heart prompted her, to come to the help of the excited woman.

"It is my fault, I was unkind towards mother."

"You?" There was a doubting surprise in the Count's tone. He could not believe his wife's words, but he understood her and said nothing.

A short time later, when he told Paula, to be ready for the departure, she turned mechanically to her step-mother and asked her, whether she would join them for the performance of the mass. Ludmilla thanked her with a grateful glance. To the surprise of the Count she accepted the invitation; but on him rested so many burdens, that he could not give much thought to the fact that his mother-in-law attached herself to their party.

Chapter XVII.

From every direction came the country-people, arrayed as for a high festival and in a solemm mood with uplifted hearts. Hardly one of them understood the rich musical performance, which awaited them; but it was enough, that their King had ordered it and that he, himself, would participate. Some had come from great distances where the invitation had reached them. All felt sympathy for the hardly pressed Monarch and their hearts prompted them, to show their devotion and love,

while hostilities increased from day to day. From some loyalists word had been sent out for a meeting after mass in the Almen-Inn, in order to consult over the present critical situation. They silently shook hands and stepped with devotion through the wide door into the beautiful stately chapel, out of which came the inviting tones of the exquisite organ. The sun was just setting. But the chapel itself was radiant with the light of countless candles. At the side where the walls were richly decorated with Bible scenes, rose a gallery resting upon slender marble pillars. Here, opposite to the organ and the choir was a seat for the King, shut off by a heavy curtain of crimson velvet and connected by a door with the castle. Before the organ stood the Choir Master Albert with the singers, among them Frau Eva, waiting only the King's entrance for a sign to begin. In front of the altar, decorated with a picture by a distinguished artist's hand, representing the women at the grave of Christ, old Father Berner stood beside the Court Chaplain celebrating the mass, at the King's special wish. Already seat after seat had been filled in the Church as well as in the gallery. Here Paula with her step-mother and the family Feldau had taken their seats. Here also the strong characteristic head of the Forester Wallburg was seen, at the side of his son, the Professor, who had driven from the Capital especially for the approaching meeting at Almen-Inn. Between the youthful daughters of Frau Katharina Feldau appeared the frank and handsome face of George von Randau. The only one missing from the inhabitants of the Hunting Castle was Emma Waldow.

At last the coming and going in the church aisles

ceased, and all eyes were turned towards the gallery, where the rich velvet drapery which hung over the door connecting with the King's apartment, was pushed away. Breathless silence prevailed as the Monarch, in the uniform of his regiment of the Body-Guards, decorated with his orders, beautiful and stately as ever, stepped through the door and, followed by his adjutant, moved forward to the balustrade. Nothing about him indicated his severe sickness which rumour had reported, except the striking pallor of his countenance and lines of suffering around his mouth and brow. Ludmilla, till now deeply veiled, moved by the excitement of the moment, drew back the veil from her face, and it seemed to her as if those unnaturally brilliant eyes fixed themselves upon her with a reproach, not threatening, not punishing, but with an agonized question: "Have I really pushed your love with disdain from me, have I stepped upon you, as you are so willing to say? Did I not on the contrary show a respectful pity toward you? did I not meet you with knightly protection, and you, you never have spared me!" Ludmilla shut her eyes. She felt as if this questioning look pierced like a sharp dagger to her heart. Pressing her lips together, to subdue the cry of physical pain she felt, she leaned back in her chair.

Not until the Requiem began and the singers lifted their voices in a solemn chorus, did she dare to lift her eyes. The King sat motionless, listening. Had she dreamed? Was it the eye of the King or rather the voice of conscience so forcibly suppressed, which awakened in her and demanded its right, and knocked accusingly at her heart — this cold, selfish and avenging heart?

As a call from another world seemed to her the wonderful melodies of this death-song from the lips of a dying genius. Perhaps this masterpiece had never been so perfectly performed as now, for each one of the performers strove to give his best, to put his whole soul into the reproduction of this noble work of art. Rarely had Frau Eva's voice sounded so soft, so full of soul as to-day. For the first time she was near enough to recognize the King, and the effect of his appearance had moved her most deeply. Her heart overflowed with pity and admiration, and what she felt her song expressed in artistic perfection. Did the King perceive it? Once it seemed to her, as if he bowed his head lightly in recognition. How her heart beat with satisfaction! Could there be a better reward for her, than to have the proud consciousness, if only for a moment, to have thrown a ray of light into the dark existence of the King? Now she did not feel it as formerly abasing for her art, to sing before one listener, who had even withdrawn himself from the view of the performer. For has not one soul who is able to comprehend the artist entirely, more value for him than the private applause of a great unknowing multitude? Yes, to-day, when hundreds are looking at her, hundreds are listening to her, to-day she sings for the King alone.

In an unusually solemn mood the congregation at the close of the mass left the chapel. The King had been the first to withdraw. In the antechamber which lay between his study and the gallery of the Chapel, he reached his hand to Count Adlershorst, dismissing him kindly.

"I feel the need of reconciliation with my God," he said, "and I have asked Father Berner to hear my

confession to-day. To-morrow, dear Count, I shall see you."

The Count's eyes followed him with fear, as he retired to his room.

What did this mean? First the Requiem, than a confession for him, who, as long as the Count could remember, had confessed to no priest.

Stepping out to the brightly lighted place before the chapel, he saw his wife in the midst of a group of ladies. Before he could make his way to her through the crowd, he felt his arm lightly pressed, and turning, saw the well-known countenance of the Forester Wallburg, who greeted him hat in hand.

"Just a word, Sir," he asked; "perhaps you do not know, what alarming news my son has brought from the Capital?"

"Alarming news?" asked the Count, what is it?"

The forester stepped nearer. "It seems they are preparing extreme measures. My son will give exact particulars in the Almen-Inn, what he has learned. Is it possible for my dear Count to be present?"

"Certainly, I am coming, my worthy friend. At what hour is the meeting?"

"Immediately. All that are here are going either on foot or by carriage to the Inn. I am waiting here with my son-in-law for old Father Berner, who is just now occupied by His Majesty, but whose wise counsel we cannot do without."

"So there would be time for me, to accompany my wife home?"

"Certainly, my Count. They must first assemble and your good horses will soon catch up with us."

Hastily Count Adlershorst sought his wife, who stood conversing with Frau von Feldau and Frau Eva. The latter had already left the palace, but the Baroness was not with them. Almost without saying good bye, Ludmilla at the close of the service had driven away.

The beautiful half-grown daughters of Frau Katharina hung on their mother's arms, like two buds on a full-blown rose. It was a sweet picture and the Count, in spite of his depressed mood, could not help looking upon it with pleasure.

Frau Eva turned to him at his approach vivaciously.

"Welcome, you faithful guard of our gracious Sire!" cried she, stretching to him her delicate hand. "On you alone rests now the only hope of His Majesty's friends."

"Oh, my dear lady," the Count answered embarrassed, "how little I am able to do! I have nothing but my good will, and what is that in the face of the mighty ones of earth!"

"Have you no hope?"

The Count shrugged his shoulders with an expression of sad resignation.

"If I had not, how could I have lived through these days?"

At this moment, the Choir-master Albert stepped up to the artist, to offer his arm and to lead her to the waiting royal carriage.

Paula and Katharina addressed a few words of recognition to him, who greeted them in a respectful manner.

Frau Eva turned once more to the Count and said whispering:

"I heard it said in the Capital, that Graf Goldberg

would be sent here with a commission. Warn His Majesty, dear Count."

"Impossible," broke forth Adlershorst excitedly. "Count Goldberg would dare, after what he has presumed against the King, to appear before his eyes again!"

"He does dare it," answered Frau Eva, "because he knows he is protected by the Commission."

"And perhaps," added the Count gloomily, "to convince himself with his own eyes of the effect of his hellish deed. Oh that my hands were not tied out of consideration for the King! They tremble every time I hear the name of this traitor."

"Do not let me regret, dear Count," the artist whispered emphatically, "what sympathy for His Majesty has made me say. For heaven's sake, no shedding of blood! Preserve yourself for your beautiful wife and give over this coward, who is hardly worth your scorn and is nothing but a common hypocrite, to a higher judge, who will know, how to punish him!"

Appealingly stretching out her hand, over which he bowed thanking her, she quickly followed her companion to the carriage.

Paula, who had expected her husband to stay in the Castle over night, was agreeably surprised, to be accompanied at least to the house and to know him free till the next evening; for the royal service always began at night.

Chapter XVIII.

The soft tones of the organ continued during the night in the brilliantly lighted chapel, while the grey-haired priest sat with folded hands in the artistically carved confessional, leaning his ear to the confessing King, who knelt before him on the costly embroidered velvet cushion.

"We are all sinners and have fallen far short of the glory, which ought to be ours," spoke the mild voice of the old man encouragingly.

"During long days and wakeful nights, I have searched my life," the answer came; "every sin which I have committed, has graven itself on my heart with a sharp stone. Many years have passed since I have knelt on this stool, but I do not accuse myself on that account. Ever since I began to think, have I recognized the dogmas and usages of the church as a garment of the divine and unsearchable, loosely thrown together by man's hand. According to the Saviour's command: When thou prayest go into thy chamber and stand not upon the street corners — I withdrew as much as possible from public religious demonstrations and kept God in my heart, but not upon my tongue. As a man, I had that right, but not as a King, who should protect the sanctuary of his people, and from whom his people have a right to demand, that he should pray in their midst, and take part in their forms of adoration for the Highest One. I acknowledge now that I have failed, and I repent it deeply."

"Spera in Deo", said the priest solemnly. "The Apostle Paul says: For now I see through a glass darkly, but

then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know, even as also I am known."

The King bowed his head: "Amen", said he.

After a short pause he continued: "I have, from my earliest youth, been surrounded by intrigue, led into temptation, flattered and deceived. I resolutely fought out many a fight and withstood many a temptation. That made me proud. I thought myself better than others, I desired like a god to be enthroned on a mountain in the clouds, far from earthly strivings, to punish and to reward from an invisible height. I have sinned heavily through this pride. I coveted a life apart from mankind and I became a stranger to the world, which did not understand me, and which I did not understand. Penitent and in contrition I acknowledge this before God the Almighty, but before Him only. God alone can judge a King, not man."

A short pause followed. The King raised his head listeningly. At last the answer came from the lips of the priest:

"The Lord, who pitieth, speaks: Mountains shall fall and the hills pass away, but my grace shall not fail thee."

"Amen," added the King.

"I have tried faithfully to fulfil my duty as ruler," began he again, "but I should have accomplished more and have become an example of activity and strength for many, if I had not simply been satisfied to do what must be done. An enthusiastic desire filled me, to prepare in my country a home for the fine arts, and to erect ideals of beauty in opposition to the materialism of the time, and I rejoiced by the grace of God to be born

to the throne, where power was given to me to bring to reality the ideas which I carried in my soul; but soon he, who thinks himself almighty, must confess, that his power is limited and his creation is and must be only a trifle. Whatever great, brilliant or original may have arisen from my plans, it, in no sense, corresponded with the pictures which were always before me.

"Dissatisfied, I cast away what was within my reach and sought always something new, something better. The resources of a King, which I had thought inexhaustible, proved insufficient, but the willfulness, the selfish passion, which seeks alone its self-satisfaction and not the interest of others, led me to disregard this. Then the people called their King a spendthrift, an inconsiderate dreamer — and they were right. I deeply repent my shortsightedness."

"And because we acknowledge this, the hour is come to awake from our sleep," sounded the solemn tone from the confessional.

The King remained silent for a time.

"I was brought up," he then continued in a low voice, "with love and reverence for my parents and the relations of our house. But no one of them would understand me — yes, they resisted my will, disliked all my tendencies. So love was extinguished in my heart. Even from the sacred person of my mother I felt separated by the difference in our thinking and feeling, and as those, from whom I expected support, comfort and encouragement in the hard, responsible path of my life, showed themselves hostile to me, as they attacked the dearest thing which I possessed, then my heart was hardened and hate and suspicion entered it. Since then

every contradiction has seemed to me an offense against my Kingly authority, and as the tempter approached the Saviour whispering to him: I will make you ruler of this world — so spoke he to me: You have the power, you can destroy all that opposes your will. Crush the snails, which lie in your way and become again what you were, the beloved, the almighty ruler of your country."

The King grew silent and the priest also remained so for a while. At last he asked with his soft mild voice:

"Do you repent of this, my son?"

Again there was a pause, then came the answer in a harsh tone:

"No, I do not regret it, my Father. Does not the scripture say: A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye? Shall I, defenseless, let myself be trampled upon?"

A deep sigh escaped the old man. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you," he said in a low voice; "lift the sword of justice to punish the unjust, but let the sun of mercy shine over them."

"My Father, you ask too much. Compassion and justice, where on earth are these virtues united? I am human and my blood is hot. If I once take up the sword, it will fall upon the just and the unjust."

"A merciful God save Your Majesty and us from this!" exclaimed the priest.

"O Lord and Saviour!" continued he praying, "visit us in thy great compassion and guide our feet in the way of peace."

"Peace dwells not here, my Father. My life is at the parting of the ways. Three roads lie before me, but all lead into darkness and night. To which shall I turn?"

Here blood and destruction, there unspeakable and unendurable misery — only at the end of the third a light in the distance: redemption, freedom. My Father, do you believe in the continuance of life after this earthly shell is broken?"

"I live and thou shalt also live," says the Lord. Are you a Christian and doubt this?"

"Ah, my Father, where in this time of bold materialism is there a place, where doubt had not forced itself in? Only the simple, the poor in spirit have still the old faith. I, the ruler of a richly gifted people, distinguished in science and art, have taken pains to pluck for myself the fruit of science, the blossom of art. Yes, my Father, I acknowledge my unbelief. Dark and agonizing hours come over me in which I doubt all, even God Himself and his justice. Then all sinks from under me and fearfully I stretch out my hand for support, but find nothing."

"I believe, dear Lord, help thou my unbelief," prayed the priest softly; "show me thy way and teach me thy path."

The King bent nearer to the ear of the priest:

"And if there is a life after this, my Father, there is also a reunion. One has gone before me, my Father, one towards whom I have sinned deeply, you know it. Her love to me blasted the blossom of her youth and beauty. She died in the convent. In selfish longing I desired to possess her, my soul cried for happiness and yet I lacked the strength to keep this happiness. You, my Father, received the last confession of this one sacrificed to me, as you now receive mine. I know, her pure soul had forgiven me; but I have never been able to forgive

myself. The sad face of this beloved one follows me, places itself between me and every joy, every awakening inclination. I have atoned already upon earth; give me absolution, my Father, from this most painful debt." Again a deep sigh reached the King's ear. "So dare I go full of confidence to the darkness of the grave?"

"As soon as the Lord calls you from earth," the priest's voice trembled earnestly and admonishingly. "May Your Majesty never forget, that God the Almighty alone has power over life and death. He has given you this life, you owe it to him, until he demands it from you. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good."

The King did not answer. Softly spoke the priest the prescribed words of absolution, and out of his heart came an ardent prayer for the kneeling Monarch at his side, who in the darkness of doubt suffered the bitterest pain of soul.

"Pax Domini, sit semper tecum!" he added, stretching his hands in blessing over the kneeling one.

"Per omnia saecula saeculorum, Amen!" answered the King's voice.

All was silent and only the organ's low tone continued its soft vibrations through the chapel. —

Those waiting at the gatehouse, the old Forester and Herr von Feldau, had become impatient. Before the door, old Martin and Sepp had been looking half an hour towards the castle portal, to see if Father Berner would not come. Inside Bärbel had offered the two men a jug of beer, but neither of them had touched it.

"Where can Father Berner be?" Herr von Feldau asked with impatient restlessness. "I really think we ought

not to wait longer, but to go on without him. Besides it seems to me, we ought to spare the old man. He has had an exhausting day."

The old forester agreed with him. "Still it is against my wish," he added. "You do not realize how great an influence far and near our good Father has. His consent gives the right sanction to all our decisions."

"And yet perhaps it is better that he remain away from 'the meeting to-day'," said Herr von Feldau. "Could he, the consecrated priest of God, agree to force? Certainly not, and I feel that we shall be obliged to seize this remedy."

"You feel what I hope, Erich. We defend our hereditary Lord and King, that is our solemn duty and obligation."

"Only so long, father, as he is our ruling Lord. If he ceases to be that, each active resistance will become treachery toward the state."

The old forester coughed impatiently.

"Does that mean, Erich, that you will hold to your King only as long as —?"

"As long as law and right according to the government is not taken from him."

"And if that occurs, you will calmly look on when his enemies overcome him —?"

"Can we hinder that, father?"

The forester struck his fist on the table. The veins of his forehead filled. "Yes, we must, yes, we will hinder it."

Herr von Feldau, accustomed to the violence of the old man in this direction, stepped back.

"Then I shall not be there. I am a husband and father of a family, I must take care that my wife and

children are not driven out of their home. — Do not count on me, if you make resolutions which are contrary to the law.”

“Good, so go,” muttered the Forester. “I give my grey head gladly for the King, and if I must loose my dear home in which I and my wife have been happy through a long life and where my children were born, so let it be. If I must die in a strange land, far from my home — so may I rest there with a clear conscience.”

Herr von Feldau moved uneasily without answer, then most welcomely Sepp came to the door with the news, that his Reverence was just coming. The forester hurried to meet his friend, who entered with a bowed head and unsteady step. Bärbel with womanly thoughtfulness placed a chair for the Father, into which he sank deeply exhausted.

“Leave me alone, please, I need nothing, but a few hours of rest;” he said to the others. “Go therefore, I beg you, without me. I am too old — my strength is at an end. Bärbel will surely grant me a place here till you return.” She courtesied overjoyed.

“What high honour, Your Reverence!”

The forester and Herr Feldau exchanged a quick glance. Then they silently shook the hand of the priest and went out.

He listened to the departing vehicle with a bowed head, then folded his trembling hands in deep emotion and prayed aloud:

“O Lord, my God, be gracious to our poor, beloved King!”

Chapter XIX.

Professor Wallburg and George had preferred in the fresh, cool May evening to walk to the Almen-Inn. The large part of the crowd had disappeared in the darkness of the wood, as they stepped out of the Schloss. They silently walked along side by side, and it was not until the turning of the road, that they gave once more a last look to the still brightly lighted castle, reflected in the dark lake. The Professor turned with sudden earnestness to his young companion, asking: "You are surprised, are not you, that I am so ardent a partisan of the King?"

And, as the young man lifted his head in visible surprise, the Professor added quickly:

"Or have you not heard even in my sister's house about my past, about the pain of my life, which has made me the solitary, lonely man, I am to-day?"

George seized the Professor's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Yes, yes, I know, and I am full of admiration for your high-mindedness, which, forgetting all that lies behind you, takes only that into account which your sense of justice demands."

The Professor shook his head.

"You are mistaken, my young friend. I have forgotten nothing, — nothing; and what I do, I do in memory and in the fulfilment of the last wish of the departed one. You have probably heard, of the beauty of my Cousin Franziska, of her talent, of her artistic singing. We were brought up together, my love for her awakened in our childhood, and became a part of myself.

And she also loved me —" here his voice became soft — "until the King came between us and our happiness. You will be astonished, George, that even while I suffered more than I am able to express, the love did not die out of my heart. I should have been ready at any hour to reach out my hand to her, to protect her against the maliciousness of those who persecuted her. Call this weak and unmanly, if you will, but so was it. From the days of my boyhood, I had had no other thought in regard to her, than that we belonged to each other. But this humiliated woman, this despairing one, who had been saved from suicide by Father Berner and me —, even then, decidedly rejected any other than friendly relations to me. This friendship, however, this sisterlike affection, she granted me till her death. Me, and me alone, she wanted, when she felt the hour of departure near. Father Berner made known her wish to me, he lead me to her convent, to her deathbed. 'I have given you so much pain, Romuald,' said she, while the pallor of death transformed her features, 'and I cannot pass away without telling you, how much it grieves me, and without begging your forgiveness'. My heart was so full that I could not utter a word. I bent over her hand and kissed it with my tears.

'My good brave cousin,' said she, 'thanks, thanks for your loyalty. I am not wrong, am I, continued she, 'to dare to ask a last request from your unselfishness'.

"Speak, speak, I begged, and even, if it is most difficult, I shall do it for you.

'It is hard for you, so hard for you!' She turned her head away and I saw that she wiped a tear from her eye. 'Romuald,' she began after a few minutes of

controlling herself, 'what I have not said even to my Confessor, you shall hear.

'The nun, much as she tried in prayer and castigation to rid herself of the sinfulness of her love, must to-day, in face of death, confess to you that this love was her greatest, her most beautiful earthly possession. Yes, if it should be granted me to live my life over again, I could not do otherwise than to accept the noble heart offered to me and to love the noble one with all the power of my being.

'The only time that a strange chance had brought the King to me, here in the gardens of the cloister, to me, whom he believed dead but who, instead, had only just taken the veil, there escaped from him in the bitterness of his pain a word of reproach, which since then has not ceased to echo tormentingly through my soul. 'You live, and yet have left me alone! Oh God, what have you done?' Yes, what had I done? From day to day it became clearer to me that the last vision of love, which had lighted the days of this noble one with me, had departed from him. I understood it now too late, yes, too late, what I had been to him and I wept in my quiet cell that I dared no longer be near him. So near we were and yet so far and separated without hope for the whole of this earthly life. The agony of the sleepless nights in which I turned this thought over and over was unspeakable. No prayer could relieve me. Peace would not come back to my soul. Doubts arose in me, whether I had done right, whether I was not to blame for this sad change in his life, of which even rumours reached us into the cloister. I know how much he is persecuted for his singular life, and how the foundations

began to sink under his feet. Enemies everywhere, traitors about him, and only a few devoted friends, brave hearts, who cling close to him. 'You, my cousin,' she went on and her voice grew more and more appealing and urgent, 'you cherish ill-will against him. Listen to the request of a dying-one. Let this ill-will be buried with me.

'From now on think only of his great and good characteristics, which are darkened by the fanciful aspirations, with which he seeks to drive away the loneliness of his heart. Remember that I have loved him unto death, not because he is the King, but because I recognized in him the noblest, most highly-gifted, kindest man in the world and that it is not his fault, that this love was my ruin. Become a friend to him, as you have been to me, in spite of all that has divided us, hold true to him, who so wholly deserves the loyalty of the best of his subjects. Take up his cause with the people and hinder them, if they abuse him in their injustice, work to win new love for him, and if the need which I foresee, should arise, then stand unmoved by his side for the sake of her, whose last sigh will be a prayer for him, the best, the purest of men, she has ever known.'

With a sigh from the depth of his heart the Professor stopped, then continued quickly:

"I certainly promised her everything and what I then promised, I now seek to carry out. Do you now understand me, George?"

George had listened in full sympathy to this story of devoted love.

"I thank you for your confidence, my valued friend," he replied with emotion. "Now things become clear

to me, even the life of the King and the strangeness of his inclinations. The departed one may have been right. If she had had the courage and strength to stand at his side in spite of the enmity of the world, to have granted him the comfort of her love, his mind would not have been so clouded and his life might have been happier."

The Professor shook his head doubtfully.

"Perhaps! Who can decide that to-day? Certainly it seems to me, that his sensitive nature reaching out for love, for unselfish devotion such as he had to offer, has suffered painfully and suffers still to-day. But whether Franciska could have supplied this, and whether she could have made out of him the unflinching and strong-willed man which a throne demands, that I still doubt. She, herself, was too soft and yielding a nature and lacked energy, and that it is not possible for even a strong powerful will to revive the low spirits of the Monarch, has been proven by Count Adlershorst."

"The situation at present is especially difficult," said George thoughtfully. "However, the King never lacked in important and deciding moments in power of will."

"And yet he has always lacked it in the affairs of his own life," added the Professor.

"That is a hard reproach, one, which I hardly expected from you."

"A hard one, but a just one. I am a mature man, George, and though your worthy father often enough calls me hot-headed — sometimes, I must confess, not without reason — still I think my judgment about certain things is ca'mer than yours, for in youth feeling rules. Confess it, George, since you have been in personal

contact with the King, have you not had a personal enthusiasm for him?"

"I do not deny this for a moment. Deeply as I had always felt for this high-spirited, ideal Monarch, in spite of his erratic ways, still I was not entirely captivated until now when I have experienced his charming amiability and his personal fascination."

"Characteristics, which no doubt he has — as I have had to suffer for them. But nevertheless they do not excuse his defects. One who gives way so entirely to his fancies, need not be surprised, if the world begins to doubt the clearness of his brain, or to think that he is seized by a mental disease."

"What," interrupted George with irritation, "could you really believe — ?"

"That the physicians' statement is based on proof? My dear friend, I am no doctor, and abstain from any judgment or censure. But what I see is that their behaviour towards the King, even in case he should be as sick as they pretend, is cruel. Duty and human consideration are demanded in such a case, but especially here in that of the King, where so much has been neglected and so much injustice been done to him that he has become embittered. But believe me, George, behind this all is the maliciousness of foes, who secretly feed the flame that shall destroy him, and who fight not the mistakes but the good qualities of the King, because these hinder them from carrying out their selfish ambition. Cleverly enough they push certain persons into the foreground upon whom the eyes of the people rest, and who, acting in good faith, will later have to answer for the intrigues of these unscrupulous men. May

God's hand be over us. And may He grant that we may yet be able to destroy this web, in which they hope to entangle both, friends and foes. At any rate the King must be protected from any violent act, whose effect might be fatal for him, and to this end the brave true mountaineers, to whom I spoke to-day at the Almen-Inn, must help us. Should they accomplish nothing, at least it would be refreshing and comforting to the King to find in these simple men faithfulness and loyalty even to death!"

George nodded assentingly.

"Count Adlershorst says the same," he remarked. "Unfortunately he has little hope for success, as the King, in consequence of the ominous conversation with Count Goldberg, had fallen into an apathy which makes one fear the worst."

"The tricky rascal," the Professor ejaculated. "Who would have sought such infamy in this cheerful, easy-going cavalier!"

"I am afraid," said George in a low voice, "as soon as the conditions have cleared up a little, that Count Adlershorst will call him to account for the matter."

"Do you mean, that he intends to challenge him for a duel?" the Professor asked. "For my part I hope sincerely that it may not come to that. Not because I do not wish to see this miserable wretch punished; but because I consider the life of Count Adlershorst too precious, to be thrown into the balance against that of a Goldberg. However these are medieval prejudices, to which our aristocracy is still devoted. Pardon me, George, I forgot that you, too, belong to the nobility."

George answered only with a shrug of the shoulders.

They had already reached the Inn, before which numerous groups of the country people stood in conversation. They immediately surrounded the Professor. He also was a child of the mountains, akin to them in their strong, obstinate demands for justice, in their loyalty and sincerity, which at any time was ready to offer its blood and its possessions in case of need for their hereditary monarch and for the Fatherland. As half-an-hour later the forester and Herr von Feldau arrived, they found the Professor upon an improvised platform, speaking earnestly to the listening crowd.

"So it is," concluded he, "you know all now, the Commission which is empowered to take the King by force, may at any moment tear him from us. Will you quietly see that take place, see our good Master, with whom we to-day have celebrated the holy mass, be overtaken and arrested like a high-way robber?"

"Nevermore!" came the answer unanimously from all sides; fists were clenched and raised threateningly.

"Let them come, these cowards, we shall send them home! We shall not let our King be captured! The way to his sacred person must be over our dead bodies!"

The excitement spread from one to the other. At this moment, Count Adlershorst, who had entered unnoticed during the Professor's speech, pressed his way through the crowd.

"Make room for the noble Count!" shouted a voice. They moved to one side, swung their hats and thundering shouts echoed through the hall, vibrating and causing the chandeliers to swing in their sockets.

"Hurrah for Count Adlershorst! Hurrah, hurrah!"

The Count stepped upon the platform near Professor Wallburg, who made room for him immediately. He was still in the full gala-uniform, in which he had been present at the church, by the side of the King. His quick glance took in the crowd. Did he seek to find out whether under these hundred of eyes, looking up at him enthusiastically, there might perhaps be one of a traitor? But there was only a minute's hesitation. "How pale he looks! How full of care!" whispered they sympathetically to one another. And now he spoke with a voice trembling with emotion:

"What Professor Wallburg has just told you, is new even to me. I thank you in the name of His Majesty for your love and loyalty, but my duty compels me to remind you what will happen if His Majesty should submit, if all of your devoted sacrifice should be in vain. Then you will be treated as rebels, and as such be brought before the bars of the Court."

"So let it be! All for the sake of our King! Possessions and blood, liberty and life!" So echoed from all sides the answers to his listening ear. Nevertheless the cloud did not pass from his brow.

"God bless you for your loyalty," began he again. "I am convinced that His Majesty will be deeply moved by it. But that he will accept your sacrifice, I cannot promise."

An exclamation of surprise broke from their lips.

"Not accept it? He must, he shall not hinder us!"

"What are you doing, Count?" whispered the Professor to him. "You make the people timid!"

"I shall preserve these brave men from going to ruin," said he quickly. A great tumult arose in the hall. The landlord hurried from one group to another,

spoke quietly to one and to another, and then stepped respectfully up to the Count.

"What do you wish, landlord?" said the Count.

"We wish to hear your advice, my Count, what is the best for us to do under the present circumstances."

"You wish my advice?" the Count repeated in a loud voice. "It is that you choose a deputation out of your midst, and tell His Majesty yourselves your desires."

The men looked at each other. That was so simple, the very best thing to do. Why they had not thought of it themselves? Romuald smiled and whispered into George's ear:

"Excellent! But what if that makes no impression on the King? It is the last remedy and the right one."

They began at once to choose the messengers. The first vote was for the eighty year old mountain peasant, who still went about erect and strong, wearing the becoming mountain costume. Then they voted for the most noted farmers of the vicinity. It was a stately group, which now stood in line before the scrutinizing eyes of the Count, all earnest faces with firm determination in them, their eyes lighted up with honest enthusiasm and loyalty. The old forester with his son, Herr von Feldau and George went about listening and giving advice to the men. They decided at once to form cautiously a small body of men, organized with military precision to take over the watch in the neighbourhood of the Schloss, and George was chosen as their leader. In their first zeal for the good cause no one had noticed that a stranger in hunting costume had casually entered the room, whose lurking eyes under his deeply drawn hat quickly wandered from one to another of the group.

First when old Resi opened the kitchen-door to offer the assembled men some refreshments, her eye fell upon the fellow, who hastily turned his back to her. Before she could warn the landlord of this unbidden guest, she saw that he had made for the door and disappeared.

"A spy, a spy," cried she, pointing in the direction in which he had gone. Immediately a number of the younger men started in pursuit of him, but in the darkness of the woods it was impossible to trace him.

"Who was it?" questioned they, pressing about the old woman. "Burdach, or — his ghost," gasped she and her whole frame trembled.

"Burdach, he is long since dead. The old woman is mad, or she is dreaming!"

Here and there others agreed that they had noticed the stranger and Sepp struck his forehead, saying: "Now I know, why I did not recognize him at once." — "It was his helmet; the rascal who wished to steal from His Majesty, but who got something else to remember him by for it."

"And this scoundrel," interrupted the Professor angrily, "who has lately appeared as the chief witness accusing His Majesty, dares to show himself here?"

"I have heard," remarked Sepp, "that through the intercession of Justice von Gleichen he has received a position as hunter in the forestry of the Alpine Castle."

"He shall be caught," spoke the old Forester in a threatening voice, "leave that to me, children. He shall not escape his punishment."

Herr von Feldau pressed heavily his father-in-law's arm. "I beg you, father. Let him alone. What can he do to harm us?"

"At least," said Count Adlershorst, "his report can hasten their proceedings and that, at all event is desirable for all parties, especially for the King, who suffers intensely under this condition of uncertainty. And, moreover," added he, drawing near to the Professor, who bowed assentingly, "we all know now what we must expect and we must be prepared."

Herr von Feldau stroked his beard uneasily, and said to himself: "Yes, what we must expect — have I really any right to stake my existence and that of my family in this way? All will be in vain. There is no question about that."

Still the men had to decide upon the hour for the deputation to come together. Count Adlershorst took upon himself the duty of presenting them to the King. The old forester begged to be allowed to go with them.

"His Majesty must know how devotedly his old servant still hangs to him," cried he.

The Count thanked the old man and turned then to Herr von Feldau, as the Professor had at once said that he would be obliged to return to the Capital in the early morning. To his question as to whether they might count upon his presence, Herr von Feldau replied in the negative, as it would be impossible for him to be away from the upper forestry.

Count Adlershorst understood this at once and parted from him coolly. The old Wallburg scowled heavily, and as his son-in-law invited him to get into his carriage and ride with him to the forestry, he answered decidedly, that he wished to spend the night in Almen Inn.

"But Kathi expects you," added the Forstmeister embarrassed.

"You can comfort her in case anything should happen to me."

"Dear father, what do you mean? You surely do not mean to do any fighting?"

"Do you think, that we are only playing comedy? The times are too serious for that."

Herr von Feldau shrugged his shoulders, "At your age I believe you have at least the right, yes, the duty, to leave fighting to the younger ones."

"People think differently about their duties," growled the old man. "In this matter we do not agree. Go your own way, I cannot hinder you, and let me go my way also."

Herr von Feldau did not reply and gave George a sign to follow him. Professor Wallburg remained a while to comfort Resi, who had eagerly prepared the best room for him, then he broke away to call for Father Berner at Felsenschloss and to ride with him to the lake. He found His Reverence recovered but in a very depressed mood. Romuald must give him a detailed report of all that had taken place at the Inn, but his only answer was a sigh. "In God alone is our hope. His will be done."

Chapter XX.

The Queen Mother had spent the night in prayer. Now she left her room, her pale face with its great dark eyes covered with a black veil; a dark gown, nearly too heavy for her delicate frame, fell in deep folds on the floor. As she passed through her cabinet into the great reception-hall, she paused before two oil paintings

set in costly frames, the only decoration of this room of convent-like simplicity. The one represented her husband, the late King, the other showed her son, immediately after his accession to the throne in all his fascinating youthful beauty. How often the mother's eye had rested with admiration and pride on this face, on these beaming eyes, which shone so warmly from the canvas. What hopes had she fostered for this son, so highly gifted by God, that he should bring to the old race, from which he had sprung, new fame, to the throne, which he had inherited, new splendour — and now?

Her delicate white hands folded together tremblingly, a tear glided over her cheek. Life demands hard things from its exalted ones. The Queen was well aware that she must preserve her composure, even though her heart should break under the strain. In long painful years she had learned the difficult art of self-control. She had suffered long under the increasing peculiarities of her son, each meeting with him being an agony, for mother and son did not understand each other, perhaps had never understood each other. The mother's only comfort was in the exercises of her religion; the son, in his lofty idealism, put himself above all forms and gave full play to spirit and fancy. There was no point of contact between these two opposing natures. And yet the holy feeling of love lived on in both hearts and both suffered under the necessary separation. Once more the Queen's foot lingered as she left the cabinet. She laid her hands on her fast beating heart, then she drew up, for she knew, that she would need all her strength for the coming conference with her brother-in-law, Duke Ferdinand, who had announced his visit for this hour.

In the hall, a wide room furnished with designed simplicity, whose high windows afforded a broad view over woods and meadows, scattered houses and distant villages, she was greeted by her assembled court with deep courtesy. She addressed a kind word to each one, and seemed to listen with attention to every answer, but her soul was far from all that surrounded her. Even the bright sunshine of spring, which lay entrancingly over the cheerful mountain world beyond, and which always had given brightness and strength to her mind, was unnoticed to-day. With eyes cast down she passed the windows, motioning to her confessor to follow her. In the adjoining room, simple as the preceding one, she sank silently into a chair.

"What news from Felsenschloss?" she asked the priest.

"Unfortunately nothing better, Your Majesty," was the answer given with regretful manner and averted eyes.

"Always the same unrest, the same sleeplessness, the same passionate outbreaks of anger against his servants, and what is the most serious, evil influences seem to prevail which might lead his Majesty to violent measures."

The Queen changed colour.

„Violent measures? Against whom?"

"Against all those, by whom he considers himself persecuted. Your Majesty understands, that those in his vicinity try to make use of the nature of this most unhappy disease, to enrage his Majesty against his opponents, and we may fear the very worst, if we are not able soon to put an end to these machinations."

The Queen listened with an expression of increased anxiety. But before she could reply to this painful discussion, the sound of approaching wheels came to her ear, and a few minutes later movements in the next room and the sound of footsteps announced the arrival of the Duke. Respectfully he bent over the slender hand stretched out to him, then he led her back to her chair and took a seat opposite her, while the priest remained standing at the side of the Queen. The portieres, which divided the two rooms, were let down immediately after the entrance of the Duke, that no spying eye should be able to see them. The Duke, was visibly exhausted. This visit to the widow of his brother, the mother of the unhappy King, was the hardest of his life and he would have given much, yes, perhaps the whole long desired power could he have been spared it.

"I am prepared," the Queen said with a look so full of inexpressible sadness, that it cut him to the heart.

"Speak without reserve, Ferdinand, I know that I must submit to the will of the Highest, who has laid upon me unspeakable pain."

"My gracious sister," replied the Duke, and his voice trembled in noticable emotion. "How I lament the necessity which is laid upon me to give you pain. But circumstances force me to do so, and a longer hesitation would be a sin against the country — against your son, my nephew himself."

Again a sad, woeful look met his eye.

"I know," she said in a low voice. "What have you decided about my unhappy son?"

The Duke exchanged a quick glance with the con-

fessor, a silent question as to how much the noble mother knew, and receiving a slight nod from him, he answered somewhat hesitatingly:

"It must be our first and most important duty to entrust his Majesty to the hands of eminent physicians."

"Have you any hope of his recovery?" interrupted the Queen, hanging upon his answer.

"Why should we not hope?" answered he quickly.

"Be convinced, my sister, that the King's health is and always will be the chief consideration in all our decisions. Whatever is possible to do to win back the son of my beloved brother, your late husband, for his life and his high destiny, to draw him away from the dreamy existence in which he now lives, will be attempted.

"And you will, as the reverend Father here informs me, accede to my wishes and call a consultation of medical authorities from outside of the City?"

"As soon as the necessary arrangements shall be made, to make possible a regular cure. In the meantime you may rest quite assured, my dearest sister, that the name of him to whom at first the care of the sacred person of the King is entrusted, is one of the most distinguished in science."

"So I hear to my great relief," the Queen answered with a grateful look at the confessor, who bowed deeply; "and also that the individuality of my son shall be considered as much as possible. You know, Ferdinand, how very much he avoids strange countenances."

"Of course we shall leave him some of his old servants," the Duke hastened to assure his sister-in-law.

"The old Lippert?"

"Without doubt."

"And who else?"

"For that His Majesty will have to decide himself. It is true, a great many of those useless idlers who know how to profit by their master's indulgence, shall be dismissed."

The Queen sighed, it seemed that she perceived a harsh note in the Duke's voice, which alarmed her.

"Which castle have you decided on for my son?"

The Duke pulled somewhat nervously at his gray moustache.

"That, my dearest sister, will have to be positively decided by the physicians. For the present they have fixed upon the Seeschloss."

"The Seeschloss?" The Queen made a violent protesting movement. "Impossible, I know how many doleful remembrances are connected with this castle for my poor son. He avoided it as much as possible and life there always has had a very bad effect upon his spirits. I beg you, Ferdinand, to give this up."

The Duke moved uneasily in his chair.

"Certainly, attention will be given to your wishes, dearest sister, but after all, if the physicians insist upon —"

"Still, I insist upon my request." She had spoken in such a tone of determination, that she herself was alarmed. "You will admit, Ferdinand," added she apologetically, "that I, of all people living, know best what is beneficial to my son, and even though we have met rarely, the last time Christmas Eve, yet I know exactly his inner feeling, which from childhood through his youth and manhood he has preserved, and which as a sick man still controls him."

The Duke could not hide a certain annoyance over

this quite unexpected objection of the Queen. But he thought it better to avoid further discussion.

"I should be sorry," he said controlling himself, "if I could not pay full regard to your wishes. Immediately after my return to the Capital, I shall call the physicians together, and give the matter over to their consideration."

The interview was ended, the Duke arose.

In the dining hall luncheon was served, at which the entire Court of the Queen and the adjutant of the Duke participated. After this the Prince made his adieus. — He breathed with relief, as the Queen passed through the door leading to her apartment. For it had seemed to him as if the floor had been burning under his feet, and that he could not breathe freely, until the Alpengschloss and the sad eyes of the Queen had vanished. Wrapped in his mantle, he beckoned to Minister von Feldheim of his suite and stepping with him into a bay-window, he asked him to report the proceedings of the day before, about which the minister had been informed by the Justice von Gleichen.

"But this is rebellion," cried he, "undeniable rebellion —"

"Certainly, certainly it is," agreed the minister respectfully, "as soon as the decision of the family-council has become an act of government."

"It shall become that at once."

The minister bowed deeply. "As Your Highness commands. And Count Adlershorst?" he added after a short pause. "The adjutant of his Majesty is without doubt the ring-leader of this conspiracy. Your Highness will now admit what a dangerous fellow the Count

is, and how justified is the action of Your Highness to use this opportunity to remove him at once from His Majesty. He can now give much trouble to Your Highness."

"And you say, that they have taken up arms and are ready for an active defence?"

"Your Highness knows the stubbornness of our mountain population. Someone has made them believe that the King has suffered injustice, and now they will let themselves be hewn to pieces for his sake, if necessary."

The Duke struck his sword angrily upon the floor. "Civil war? That still is needed. New scandals for the world! And what about the Commission, with which Graf Goldberg goes to-day to the Felsenschloss?"

"Count Goldberg—who is hated by His Majesty as well as by Count Adlershorst, — Your Highness can not deny that there lies danger."

"But what can we do, Your Excellency? Can you advise anything else?"

"Perhaps Your Highness will make up for the past neglect and get Count Adlershorst as quickly as possible into your power. A telegram would be sufficient —"

"What are you thinking of? The Count's followers whom he has collected, will not give him up and will prevent his arrest."

The minister did not answer for a time. "And yet, Your Highness, there is no other way," he said after a pause. "We must meet the rebellious ones with weapons, we must force them to obedience."

The Duke walked up and down restlessly. "Annoying! Most odious! This matter is to me entirely repulsive."

It looks like violence, which I wish to avoid, and yet the quicker the affair is ended the better."

"And the world," said the minister comfortingly, "will take the circumstances into account, and no one — I believe I can assure Your Highness upon my word, no reasonable man at least, will reproach Your Highness for what the pressure of extraordinary circumstances demands."

"You are right, only too right."

Reaching his hand to the minister, the Duke added most graciously: "We shall soon be in the position to reward true services. Repeat this also to Justice von Gleichen. We shall not forget him."

The eyes of the minister shone with a look of triumph. At last, at last his goal was reached, at last he was delivered from the anxious fear, that the lonely Monarch should find out the truth and should again hold Court and remove from his service all his enemies and sentence even him to a life without power. And power was the thing which he could not renounce, that which his vain soul desired more than life itself. Returning to the Capital, he did not delay to send for Justice von Gleichen, to communicate to him the gracious words of the Duke.

The lawyer's heart beat joyfully. His severe features were lighted up with secret satisfaction. With a smiling countenance he returned to his residence. When he entered, the footman announced that a lady had been waiting half-an-hour in his reception-room. A painful presentiment arose in his mind. Hastily he opened the door. A lady in a dark costume rose from a seat near the window and stepped towards him.

„Baroness, is it really you,” said he coldly. What was she to him now, this elderly woman, who had so long been his willing tool! He did not need her any more and decided to free himself as soon as possible from the duty of gratitude to her.

“You did not expect me,” she answered rapidly, measuring him with a somber look; “I see by your face, that you triumph over the mischief that you have prepared.”

“A mischief that to bring about, you, Baroness, with all your power, with all your strength have assisted me,” answered he sarcastically. “However I will not assume, that you are weak enough to regret now what you have done.” She sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

“Yes, I regret it, Herr von Gleichen.”

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. “I am sorry to say, that I am too busy to-day to listen to the phantasies of a beautiful woman — however original and spiritual they may be. You would oblige me, if you would postpone the conversation to a more opportune time!”

“To a more opportune time!” continued she with flaming eyes. “You well know what it concerns without my telling you, but you shall not escape me. I will not live on with this thorn in my heart, I will not. Since I saw the King yesterday for the first time in years, I know that you have deceived me, have given me false reports. The King is not as sick as you wish to make me believe.”

He scowled.

“Hm! I think I understand. You were present yesterday at the mass at Felsenschloss, and a weak

woman is again on her knees before the manly beauty of his Majesty."

Ludmilla drew up. The hot blood rushed to her cheeks.

"Justice, you insult me—you dare to —"

He tried to retrench. "Why this excitement? Tell me shortly and clearly, what wishes you have to the fulfilment of which I can help you.

"I came here to ask you, to beg you, to do all, all that is possible, to prevent these extreme measures toward the unfortunate Monarch, and if it is not possible to repeal the measures decided upon, still to grant him the indulgence which belongs to the misery of fallen Highness."

"You may be convinced, Baroness, that this indulgence will be observed according to the special wish of the Duke.

"And yet I am told that he gave orders to-day to take the King forcibly from the Felsenschloss."

"Take him away certainly, but who spoke of force?"

"Do you believe, Justice, that the King will go voluntarily, that this proud heart will submit to violence without breaking?"

"You forget, my lady," said he impatiently, "that His Majesty is ill, and that sick people have no will, cannot be allowed to have a will. I appeal to the decision of the physicians."

"Oh Justice, let us not speak of that. You know best of all, how they have obtained the witnesses who have brought about this judgement, you know also, who the accusing witnesses are who spoke out against His Majesty, how they have twisted truth and falsehood

in order to obtain from the physicians this fatal verdict, which alone has induced the Queen Mother and the good and just Duke to consent to it."

He stood with folded arms, his brow wrinkled, his lips quivered.

"Why, why—all this? I cannot bear this womanish sentimentality, which never knows what it wants, and if all were true that you just now have said, I can but repeat, what I now emphasize: the die is fallen and what has happened cannot be altered."

She had stepped close to him and looked at him with a threatening expression.

"Does that mean, that you refuse me assistance?"

"I do not refuse anything. But I declare myself entirely without power to have any influence to prevent the carrying out of the already issued proclamation."

She sank into a chair, ringing her hands in pain.

"In vain! All in vain! He will be driven to death and I bear the blame!"

The man before her smiled sardonically.

"I beg you, Baroness, no scenes! You wished to take your revenge on the King, who had dared to refuse your affection, you did all you could to obtain this coveted goal, and now as it is reached, you fall into hysterics.—Really I should have considered you both: stronger and wiser."

She did not answer. A glance of hate and disgust rested upon the calm man gazing coldly at her; and quickly she arose and left the room.

Chapter XXI.

George had trained his little force in the upper village and given them instructions where to meet him in the evening, to take up the night watch under his command before Felsenschloss. The King, at the special desire of Count Adlershorst, was to learn nothing about this, so everything must be managed most cautiously and discretely. With cheeks glowing and eyes radiant with zeal, George entered the dining-hall of the hunting lodge and seated himself at the table, where the family was gathered. Not without some anxiety the young man noticed the absence of Emma Waldow, who had recently not been well. Herr von Feldau, who up to this time had given the fullest liberty to the young man, looked at him solicitously this evening, but he said nothing until they had finished the meal.

Then he beckoned George to the next room.

"I did not wish to object yesterday at the Inn to the drilling of the boys from the neighbourhood, as Count Adlershorst had proposed to you, but I ask you now to drop the whole matter and not to be mixed up personally in this affair. I have just heard to my deep regret, that the suspension of His Majesty's reign has become a fact, therefore every resistance to the measures taken in regard to his defence would be punishable as rebellion against the state. Out of consideration for your parents and for your future I feel it my duty to draw your attention to the matter."

George was startled. A frightened look came over his face.

"Does the Count know this?"

Herr von Feldau shrugged his shoulders. "The information I got was of a private nature. But there is no doubt of its truth."

"But we are bound to no one," replied George hastily, "until the official proclamation is made known?"

"I have warned you, Herr von Randau, now do what you are willing to answer for, both for yourself and for your family. I do not like as your superior to forbid that, for which you perhaps have received the impulse even in my own house. You know sufficiently, how hard it is for me to do violence to my heart and to be obliged to adjust myself to circumstances, toward which resistance would be ineffectual. In spite of this I have forced myself, contrary to the wish of my own family, in spite of the prayers and tears of my wife—who, like her father, would be willing to sacrifice all for the King—to be true to my resolution and to do nothing reckless. It is my duty, to preserve the Fatherland for my son and to secure to my family a home. I want you also to consider carefully, what you are doing before you decide."

Only too clearly the excuse for his own actions sounded from the warning of Herr von Feldau and consequently had no influence upon George. He needed not the same considerations as the forester. He was still young, free,—the world stood open before him, and after all—was the warning not given more to fulfil the duty of a superior towards his subordinate, than with the wish to see it really carried out? "If you allow, Sir," the young man replied, "I shall go over to the Schweizerhaus and consult with the Count."

Herr von Feldau agreed to this.

"However, I wish to make you this proposal, which seems to me demanded, that is, to inform the Count of this change in the situation."

Both men returned together to the drawing room, where coffee was served. Frau Kathi looked up with anxious eyes. Franzel and little Kathi whispered with their brother without drawing near to George and jesting with him as formerly, and now as they turned to him he seemed to notice tearful eyes. His thoughts immediately turned to Emma and to his anxious questions after her, he received an answer, given with some embarrassment, that she was in her room, busy packing her trunk, as she would leave the house to-morrow for the City.

"So she is really too miserable, to be able to fulfil her duties?" he asked with sympathy, supposing that repeated illness had led to this sudden decision. But Frau Kathi shook her head with another sad look at her husband who, with a ruffled brow, declared that he had felt himself obliged to dismiss his children's governess. George could not hide his alarm, as the children broke into fresh tears, and seizing their father's hands, begged with sobs: "Dear, dear papa, do not let her go! We love her, and she is so good, so good —" and turning to George: "Dear Herr von Randau, do help us beg, you were always such good friends!"

Herr von Feldau withdrew his hands with an impatient movement and made a sign for Kathi to take away the children, who now with bent heads, quite overwhelmed by their grief, followed their mother sobbing out of the room. Herr von Feldau suppressed a harsh word which was on his lips, and turning to George, said:

"You can imagine, Herr von Randau, how very unwelcome in this time of excitement such a domestic drama is for me, but I was warned of this young lady long ago, especially by my worthy father-in-law, who always looked with distrust on her intimate relations to the Justice von Gleichen. But only to-day, when by chance I met my cousin Ludmilla—" he smiled slightly— "who after hearing the mass yesterday, has gone over to the camp of the King's followers and is now speeding on to the Capital to undertake steps in the King's behalf—, only to-day did I get information about the lady's character as well as news of her past, which makes it impossible to keep her longer in my house. You yourself know the unpardonable part she took in the plot against the Countess Paula. Please," he went on, as George wished to interrupt, "do not excuse yourself, I comprehend your discretion and value it; otherwise I should have spoken more earnestly with you. In spite of the suspicion which arose in me, I feared to know the truth, which would inevitably rob me of her valuable services. You have nothing to reproach yourself with in the matter."

George bowed his head. He did reproach himself for not having spoken openly at once with Herr von Feldau. Perhaps he would have been more indulgent now; but Emma herself had besought him to observe silence in regard to this affair with the family, in which she had found so friendly a reception.

"She is an orphan, utterly alone," he ventured to say. "Where could she find a refuge, if so suddenly dismissed? Might not pity alone—?"

"That she goes so soon," Herr von Feldau inter-

rupted, "is her own wish. Considering the circumstances of which you speak, I permitted her to stay with us until she should find another position. This she decidedly refused."

George understood that further intercession would be in vain, but he could not suppress a certain indignation against this rather too careful and considerate master of the house. However, he was moved to express a word of sympathy to the severely treated young woman herself. He found the door of her room standing open. Trunks, half filled with hastily packed clothing, spoke of her sudden departure. One moment he stood hesitating. What was it really that attached him to this girl? Why did the thought of parting from her, perhaps for ever, weigh upon him? Did he love her? For the first time this question arose within him. Or was it only pity with her desolation which attracted him to her? Following an impulse he knocked lightly at her door, but no answer came. Lingered a moment, he stepped in. The first room was empty, but he saw through a second door Emma Waldow kneeling before an open bureau, holding in her hand a photograph in a fine frame of bronze; it was a portrait of Countess Paula, which the latter had given her. At his approach, she rose quickly and he noticed that she had been weeping. The blood rushed quickly to her cheeks, as she saw him.—"Is it you, Herr von Randau?" said she with quivering lips.

"Pardon my unexpected visit," said he somewhat confused, "but I have just heard to my surprise, that you are leaving the Lodge very suddenly."

"I must leave," said she with averted face and a struggle for composure. "However this change in my

life is not altogether unexpected. I should have foreseen, that sooner or later, Herr von Feldau would be informed of my past—and then this change must come. I was convinced of this. Therefore, hoping to postpone this dreaded climax as far as possible, I begged you to be silent, I also begged Paula."

"The Baroness Ebersdorf has accused you," said George excitedly. "According to what I have just heard from Herr von Feldau, she seems to have broken with Justice von Gleichen and wishes to vent her scorn and to take her revenge on you, an innocent woman."

She raised her hand forbiddingly. "Innocent! Oh, if I only were that!"

"You blame yourself too much for what in part is to be attributed to the pressure of circumstances. You followed unconsciously the leading of a powerful man, whom they had taught you to honour as the representative of your father. Now that your eyes are open, you have thrown off the chains, with which they had held you, which, after all that has happened, is a most courageous act, and certainly ought to outweigh mistakes of the past."

He had spoken warmly with the deepest conviction; and she lifted her eyes with a glance so devoted, so full of overwhelming gratitude, that his heart warmed to her. "You judge me too kindly," she stammered, violently moved, "out of the fullness of your noble sympathizing heart. But I well know, that I am cut off from all good and honorable persons, because I have allowed myself to be used as a tool without resistance, even though with much repugnance. Herr von Feldau is right to send me out of his house. I dare not ask confidence

from any one, and whatever I may have to suffer will not be undeserved."

He stepped nearer to her and seized her hand, which lay cold and trembling in his own.

"But where will you go?" said he. "What are your plans for the future, now, when help is refused you even from the other side?" It disgusted him, even to mention the name of the Justice.

"Plans?" she repeated sadly. "Plans? I have none. But," she went on, "my immediate future is provided for. A friend, whom I knew in the convent, is now a teacher in the Capital, and she has offered me a refuge in her little home."

"That is a present help — but what will you do later?"

She looked down sadly.

"Later, Herr von Randau? Do you really believe me so utterly unworthy of divine pity, that I dare not hope for the grace of the Highest, which is promised even to the sinner?"

"Oh, how can you say this, Emma?" Almost unconscious of what he did he drew her into his arms, and looked deep into her drooping eyes. "You, not worthy of the grace of the Highest? You poor, misused creature, sinfully robbed of the happiness of youth! Yes, do hope and trust in God, but do not push from you the friend who offers you his help. God has brought us together." She drew back at the tender tone of his voice, and freed herself from his embrace.

"Not a word more, Herr von Randau, I beseech you, for pity's sake, leave me."

Appealingly she lifted her eyes towards him. Her whole body trembled convulsively.

George stood paralyzed at this outbreak of unexpected passion. For the first time he saw the depth of this woman's nature, the deep feeling which had concealed itself so cleverly behind the mask of cool reserve. And she loved him! The fact was thus so powerfully revealed to him that it made him tremble.

"Emma!" he cried, "shall I leave you now? You demand that, when we have just found each other? Nevermore!" He tried to put his arm around her resisting figure.

"What a fate, George!" Then, brokenly came these words from her lips. "Why did you come here? Why did you rouse me out of the peace of resignation which I had at last found, after so many bitter struggles? How can you tempt me to burden my heavy-laden soul with another sin!"

"Another sin? Emma, I have loved you ever since I first looked into your eyes. Will you push me away from you, now, just as I have discovered that you love me? I know that I cannot endure this separation, surely there must be no separation for us!"

He held the trembling girl in his arms, and pressed his lips upon her soft hair.

"George what will you do with me?"

"You are my betrothed, Emma, in whose life I have a right to take part. You must permit me, from now on, to take care of you, till the time comes, when it is possible for us to make a home."

Weeping she threw her arms around his neck. "George, is it possible? No, it must not be, I, a faded woman!"

"You, Emma? And if it were so, you would be the most beautiful woman to me because I love you, because you first awoke this deep feeling within me, which ripened in trouble, has become all the more deeply rooted in my heart."

A cry of joy came from her lips. Then again she became sad. "Your parents? They will not approve of your choice. They will call me the destroyer of their son. Ah, I would rather a thousand times die than bring unhappiness to you!"

"My parents!" answered he, softly stroking her hair. "First learn to know them, my dear. They will welcome with joy the one whom their son has chosen, and you, my poor, homeless child, will learn from them in my father's house what true family life is, what a spirit of love, tolerance and sacrifice pervades it. There you will recover; the love of their warm hearts will be the means of curing your sick soul."

"So you really mean to take me to your parents?" she asked still hesitating.

"As soon as I am free and can go to the Capital. At present, you know, a holy duty keeps me here."

"I know it," she said earnestly, "and I shall pray continually for your undertaking. Its success will take from my soul the weight which overcomes me."

He drew her passionately to himself, and covered her mouth and eyes with kisses. "Farewell, for a short time, and God grant us soon a happy reunion in the Capital. But where shall I find you there?"

Emma hastily wrote the address and put it into his hand, motioning him to go.

"Do not make this parting too hard," pleaded she.

One last parting kiss, and he tore himself away while Emma sank upon her knees and offered a prayer of thanks to her Heavenly Father for this blessed gift of love.

Chapter XXII.

In the reception hall of Felsenschloss, under the light of the glistening chandeliers the King received the deputation of the mountaineers, headed by its oldest member and by the Forester Wallburg. A sea of light and colour surrounded them in this beautiful room, with its marble walls, its mirrors and pictures in sparkling gold frames, its frecoes by an artist's hand on the ceiling, its busts on gilded pedestals, its curtains of white velvet with costly embroidery. This splendour bore a strange contrast to the heavy features of the peasants who, awkward and timid, stood shuffling their feet on the slippery hard-wood floor and twisting their hats in their rough hands. The King gazed with deep emotion on these simple men, in whose eyes he saw that, for which he had longed so keenly all his life: love — unselfish devotion, faithfulness and truth. They have come to tell him, that they are at his disposal, and to beg him not to go from them, for they are ready to protect him with blood and life against his enemies.

The King turns to Count Adlershorst at his side and exchanges with him an expressive glance. Hiding his emotion with an effort, he answers them earnestly and with dignity in a few words. But each one feels that these words come from his heart. He expresses

thanks for the devotion shown to him, but at the same time warns them, not to undertake anything thoughtless or against his wishes. "And if, after all, I must go from here," he concludes, "then, my friends, keep my memory within your heart, and do not forget, that your King escaped from the noise of town, from the restlessness of the world to the solitude of the mountains, and that he has spent here the happiest days of his life."

He passes along the row, shaking each hand, and says a friendly word to all beginning with the old Forester Wallburg.

"You place coals of fire on my head, my good friend. How much pain and suffering has come upon your family by my fault, and yet here you are, among the few who remain true to their King in the time of need, when all others foresake him."

The old man is moved to such a degree that he can not utter a word. His tears are falling and the King sees them and turns away, to hide his own. Then he turns to the old peasant, who appears very venerable with his long gray hair and his honest countenance. The King asks after his children and grandchildren, he knows them all, takes an interest in them all, and has praise and admonition for them, and so it goes until the last man is reached. Then they all turn as if by a signal and leave the hall in solemn silence. Many of them wipe away a secret tear, and each face is lighted up with determination to stand for the King with soul and body and to protect him from all possible danger.

"But nothing without his Majesty's permission," the old peasant calls out in the yard, turning to George

around whom the young men are gathering. "Leave the guns until there comes a special order. Remember this, young Master von Randau. So the King commands."

George promises to obey the orders, and each of the men vows the same, though each wishes secretly to break the vow in order to satisfy his desire for revenge on the traitors, who would lead their King to ruin. The feeling is so intense, that it is difficult for George to keep the young hotheads in order, and in silent admiration he thanks the King, who has found at this critical moment strength for the right thing and by his own words has given him the power to maintain discipline and to avoid violence. —

"Come on, my dear Count, let us give ourselves up to-day to the magic of Felsenschloss!" So saying the King steps forward to a retired place, surrounded by myrtle and laurel, where under the soft light of a chandelier, carried by graceful nymphs, stands the table on exquisite coral feet, resplendent with silver and shining glass, just as it was on the night preceeding Count Adlerhorst's wedding.

"What a short time since that hour! How quickly time has passed and yet, how rich in bitterness and pain!" The Count has learned already what had happened in the Residence, and knows that the fate of the unhappy King, who gazes now with dreamy eyes over the fairy land he has called to life, has been irrevocably decided. The last hope remaining is to save at least this remnant of kingly glory, this world of beautiful illusions. Would it be succesful, or should it be the last time that he would sit here at the King's side? With anxious thoughts he glances around this magically charming room.

Azaleas, rhododendrons in full bloom surround them in a circle of brilliant hues. The moon's soft light falls on the artificial oriental landscape, which here meets the ice peaks of the North.

The Count turns away with increasing foreboding. What a contradiction! Here, the creator of all this splendour, born to the purple, and yet perhaps the most miserable, the most to be pitied among his people. Unconscious that he is already deprived of his power and glory, and that the only protectors, who are ready and willing to stand by him in this extremity, are a dozen of armed peasants.

The King, who had just taken his place at the table, roused the Count from his dark thoughts calling out:

"Why so thoughtful, dear Count?" He beckoned him to his side. "What are you thinking of? Have these good, self-sacrificing people weakened you also? Ah, I must confess it, never has life appeared so tempting to me as now, when the sun of my life is sinking. There is truth after all, real, unselfish truth. Sincerity is written so clearly on their every countenance. Oh, if I had known it earlier, for the sake of these good people who have placed their faith and hope in me, I should have tried with all my power to hold my throne."

The Count did not dare to reply. What could he say that was comforting?

The King regarded him questioningly, then he also sank into silence. After a long pause he began again.

"We are dull companions to-day, my dear Count. I anticipated it, and for that reason have chosen for our diversion a peculiar pleasure suited to our humour. Think of it, I, whom the best artist of the world could

not often please, to-day, fancied I should have pleasure in hearing the simple art of some Tirolese singers and zither players, whom Lippert has heard in the village and of whose unusual performances he has told me."

The Count looked up in surprise. The idea was indeed strange. This devotee of Rheinhard's, so entirely given to the modern tendencies, ordering yesterday the Mozart requiem and to-day these zither players!

Was it the increasing restlessness of soul, which grasped every possibility to escape the tormenting presence of dark spirits, which reached their arms eagerly out to him? Ah, all this grasping at the fleeting beauty of the moment, all this excessive abandon to the present that yet remained his, would not hinder his approaching fate!

Did the King know the Count's thoughts? With his own fascinating charm he lifted his glass, and cried: "Fortune is fickle, dear friend, we know it, but every moment in which we still hold it, is the more precious. We still have each other, we still sit side by side. I drink to your happiness and may it be lasting. You possess it already in your lovely young wife. What an angel! Yesterday I noticed her fair beauty which seemed doubly charming when contrasted with the dark, siren countenance of her step-mother. I must say, I was greatly astonished that this woman dared to sit facing me. You see that my aversion to appearing in public is not unreasonable."

The face of the Count darkened. "Your Majesty will pardon me, that I was not able to protect you from so unpleasant a meeting. This daring woman really forced herself upon us, and in the pressure of other cares, that occurred which otherwise I should have prevented."

"You need not reproach yourself, dear Count," the King interrupted hastily. "Certainly not. Only it affected me strangely, to see again after so many years that face which was so closely connected with the happiest and saddest memories of my life, that face so beautiful, so demonic, and yet so sad as if devoured by inner torment. Yes, dear friend, say what you may, there is retribution here upon earth. The jealous hatred of this woman made an early grave for the sweetest creature that ever trod the earth! Yet, rather die a thousand deaths than live with the burden of an unatoned wrong in one's heart! And after all is death an evil? Is it not a saviour from all pain? The last friend, whose arms are opened to us, when life becomes unbearable? Is it not a blessing to end life, when honour forbids one to live on? Oh, happy friend, still embraced by the rosy chains of hymen, I ask you to pledge me in my last happiness and comfort, and drink to a quick and happy death!" He lightly touched the glass, which the Count lifted hesitatingly, emptied it to the dregs and threw it in a wide circle so that it broke clashing on the mosaic floor.

"So is my life shattered," he cried with flaming eyes. "See, dear Count, how the pieces glitter in iridescent colors. So will the shimmering fragments of my kingly career also sparkle for a while. How soon they will disappear and be forgotten, forgotten!" He sank back in the chair, his face grew pale, his eyes gazed into space.

"No, Your Majesty, no," cried the Count, lightly touching the King's arm. "A King's career cannot be obliterated. And, even if the throne itself sinks, the man who has occupied it so proudly remains the King

without the throne, and produces good in small affairs, if the greater have been taken from him."

The King's eyes rested with gloomy scrutiny upon the Count. "A King without a throne is a figure which must make way for the living. But a King who is confined, even in a gilded cage, can be nothing but an object of horror and pity. Never wish me that fate!" The Count wanted to reply, but the King motioned violently. "No more of this, to-day. I long for one last happy hour. Let the artists come to the stage."

He pressed the bell and now the unusual concert began. A masterly practised hand struck the zither and a man and a woman sang first singly, and then together. At last the girl sang alone:

If our two hearts were two bells of joy,
What would they not give of sweet melody!
You are dearer to me than all angels together,
And without you I do not wish even for heaven!

"And without you I do not wish even for heaven," repeated the King in a low voice. "In so much I am happy, for there my angel awaits me."

"Oh, Your Majesty," cried Count Adlershorst, grasping the King's hand and bending over it: "Heaven does not need you, but rather the earth!"

The King threw him a hasty glance.

"I know, my friend, be sure that at the last moment I shall not be weak, but will find the necessary courage. I promise you, you shall not be ashamed of your King."

"But Your Majesty needs something more than courage — submission to the unchangeable."

"Yes, submission, as far as honour allows it."

Zither-play and song ceased suddenly, the King

and the Count listened closely, exchanging a quick glance. A distinct murmur of voices reached their ears. The Count sprang up, grasping his sword, and the King also arose.

"Can the hour have come so soon?" he asked, while his lips turned paler. "Sooner than I expected. Do see, dear Count, who dares to disturb the peace of this last beautiful night?"

The Count had hardly reached the adjoining hall, when old Lippert came towards him with trembling knees.

"They are there." . . .

"Who?"

"The Commission with Count Goldberg."

"Goldberg—he dares to —?"

The Count bit his lip until it bled.

"And what does the Commission want?"

"To speak to His Majesty."

"Now, in the night? Impossible!"

Old Lippert came nearer to the Count.

"They come in the name of the State government and demand an audience."

The Count hesitated a moment. Then he said:

"Do ask these gentlemen, whether they have an official document for the proof of their identity."

The servant hurried up officiously, and returned within a few moments.

"They have none."

"So His Majesty is still the ruler here," the Count replied with a breath of relief.

"Where are they?"

"In the waiting-room below."

"Good, call Herr von Randau."

Old Lippert's eye glistened. "At your service, Count."

And bending over the Count's hand, he said in a faltering voice:

"Do protect our gracious Sire, he cannot endure this."

The King still sat in the same place, leaning back in his chair, when the Count returned to him.

There was something fixed in the glance, which he turned to the Count, and his eyes had a benumbed, far-away expression as of one wandering.

"Well?" he asked.

The Count reported to him as mercifully as possible what he had heard. At the mention of Count Goldberg the King retorted.

"So, they have chosen him —?" His clinched hand fell heavily on the table.

"They provoke me to the utmost. Am I still ruler in my land, or am I not? Answer me, Count Adlershorst!"

"Your Majesty is the absolute ruler."

"Now, but how long, how long?" sighed the King.

"So let us improve the time," the Count added urgently. "Every moment of delay means destruction. Will Your Majesty have the goodness to give me power to act in this matter?"

The King drew himself together and rose majestically.

"You are right, dear Count, I give you the required power. Arrest the rascals who have come to do violence to their King. Telegraph also immediately to the Commander of my Body Guard. He must hasten here with his troops for my rescue against this act of treason."

The Count's eyes flashed. It was what he desired, and the only outlet from the labyrinth in which the King was lost. If the Monarch would rouse himself

and meet violence with violence, then all could still come out right.

"Your Majesty's orders shall be carried out immediately." The Count hastened away with high courage. In the ante-chamber he found George and Lippert waiting for him.

"Now is the time to act," he called to the young man. "Are you ready?"

George looked pale, but glanced resolutely at the Count. "I await your orders."

"How many gentlemen compose the Commission?"

The Count turned to Lippert.

"Only six," he answered, but down at the Inn are a dozen more people with a carriage, in which they expect to take away the King."

"Take him away?" ejaculated the Count terrified. "Do they dare so much?"

For a moment he stared about him bewildered, then with renewed control he gave in short words his orders:

"Herr von Randau, I charge you, to arrest the Commission. Choose a few faithful men for your assistance, so that they cannot hope to forcibly free themselves, and report when all is settled. — Lippert, you must remain near His Majesty, for the King must not be left alone. I, myself, will write and despatch the telegram in which His Majesty calls the Body Guard immediately to the protection of his exalted person. The army is not released from its oath, and I know the Commander will rush gladly to the aid of the King. This is my last hope. I hope it will not prove false."

George flew rather than walked. The Commission heard with horror the decision concerning them.

"Prisoners," sneered Count Goldberg, "perhaps they will throw us into the dungeons."

"Or," cried another scornfully, "perhaps they will flay us, put out our eyes, bind us to the torture post. We should have been prepared for such things."

"No lèse-Majesté," interrupted George, whose honest heart swelled with wrath. "Another word, and each of you gentlemen will be placed in solitary confinement." The energetic young man, whom no one knew, evidently impressed them. They were silent, and submitted themselves to the present necessity.

When George returned to Count Adlershorst to inform him, that his orders had been obeyed and that the gentlemen were in confinement, a contented smile crossed his face, but again he became very serious.

"Anything else to report?"

"Count Goldberg asks your Excellency for an interview."

"Count Goldberg? Oh, this comes very opportunely."

The Count's hand touched the sheath of his sword.

"Will you be so good as to show me to the Count's room?" George hurried down through the corridor and pointed to a door. It was a high ceilinged room, lighted by a hanging lamp in the so-called Cavalier wing. An abundant collation of wine and cold meat stood on a table, to whose good things the occupant was addressing himself. As the door opened he sprang up and recognizing the Count hastened to him with out-stretched hands.

"But, dear Count," he cried in a tone of affected joviality — "what a comedy you are playing here. Im-

prisonment — though as I see," he pointed to the table, "a thoroughly comfortable one, but nevertheless a real loss of freedom. I beg you, dear friend, consider what you are doing."

Count Goldberg sank back in his chair and invited Count Adlershorst with a move of his hand to take a seat at the table. But the latter, controlling the rising anger, which threatened to overcome him, replied with cutting coldness without noticing the gesture.

"To begin with, Count Goldberg, let us change the tone of our conversation to another key than which you are choosing to strike. I have never claimed the honour to be regarded as your friend, but to-day this address seems an insult and I refuse it."

Count Goldberg turned in his chair. His handsome countenance flushed with rage.

"You insult a man, who is in your power. That offends the honour of a Cavalier!"

Count Adlershorst bit his lips.

"I am ready to answer at any moment for my words with sword or pistols, according to your choice!"

"So you seek a quarrel?"

"I do not seek it to-day! However, if you would summon me —"

"Pooh! I thought I was dealing with a sensible man. But really he who associates with fools —"

"Silence!" the Count cried in overwhelming passion. "Remember where you are, and that I will not allow you for a minute to use sneering words against your benefactor," he emphasised this word with a cutting severity, — "and your King."

"He is no more my King!" braved Count Goldberg; "nor is he yours. You should reflect before you rebel against the power of the state. I protest in my name, as also in those of my companions against this unlawful imprisonment."

"You have this right, as it is my right and duty to protect my King and Lord from violence, and to hold you here in spite of your protest. But that you, Count Goldberg, whom His Majesty once honoured with his particular confidence, whom his great goodness raised up from the depths into which your frivolous life had let you sink, whose finances he arranged, whom he overwhelmed with gifts and benefits, that you, after having once before served your King in a like manner should dare to appear again with a deadly message, that casts a spot on your honour which you must wash out with your blood. And now excuse me, if in spite of your being in my power, I express my contempt so plainly."

Count Goldberg turned ashy pale.

"Why this presumption?" he cried, "are you my judge?"

"In no sense, your judge. You will not escape your Eternal Judge, but I will be the avenger of my betrayed King and Master."

"We will settle that as soon as we are free."

"I count upon it."

Count Adlershorst turned and closed the door behind him. The other glared at him indignantly.

Chapter XXIII.

The King had passed a comparatively good night. The long anticipated conflict had arrived; he stood now in the midst of the fight and he preferred the activity of battle to the torment of anticipation.

Lippert informed him, that Count Adlershorst had passed the night in the castle and now waited in the anteroom.

"Show the Count here immediately," ordered the King.

He did not notice how sorrowful and disturbed the old servant appeared. Indeed bad news had arrived at the castle during the night. The Count's telegram to the Colonel of the Body Guard had been detained in the Capital, had not been forwarded, and a new Commission with official power was on its way to the Castle.

The Count called up all his courage to hide his depression from the King.

"Thank you, dear Count, for sacrificing another night to me," said the King with amiable smile, which seemed to his friend a reflection of former happy days. "What have you to report?"

"Unfortunately nothing good, Your Majesty. My telegram sent by your order to the Commander of the Body Guard is returned without being delivered."

"Ah —"

The King turned pale. He sank back into his chair, and a shadow fell across his face.

"Then, Count," said he quietly, "all is over and I am lost."

"Your Majesty is not lost," said the Count trying to quiet him, "unless you consider yourself lost. We still

have the brave troops at hand, who are ready to surround the sacred person of their King, and to protect him with their lives!"

"No, no —" The King shook his head forbiddingly, — "no unnecessary sacrifice, no useless bloodshed. Tell me, would it become a King, to defend himself with weapons against the power of the state? No, you cannot sincerely advise me to do that."

"There remains another way, Your Majesty," implored the Count. "Order Lippert to pack what is most needed. The coachman Martin will harness the sorrels and in an hour we shall be across the boundary and free, among a people who are true to Your Majesty and who will not allow a hair of your head to be injured."

The King shook his head.

"Flee, Adlershorst? Here see this," he took a letter from his desk and held it out to his adjutant. "Several days ago my cousin, Prince Edgar, proposed it to me. I considered it for a long time, but have at last refused. No, Adlershorst, my decision is firm. I will remain King, or perish King."

Count Adlershorst turned sadly away. At this moment there was a knock at the door and old Lippert entered.

"What is it?" asked the King.

"A telegram for the Count," said he withdrawing immediately.

The Count tore it open, then reached it to the King, whose lips quivered with pain.

"An order from the Minister of war to return immediately to the Capital. Ah, so they will tear from me my last friend, my last one."

The Count stepped nearer, seized the Monarch's hand and kissed it. "If your Majesty will allow me, I will not move."

"What, you would defy the order of the minister?"

"My first service belongs to my King."

"You risk dismissal and perhaps something worse. You have a wife, whom you must regard. I can and must not accept such a sacrifice."

"It would be no sacrifice, but the ardent desire of my heart to remain with Your Majesty. I am aware of what they may take from me, also of what I owe to my wife, but she would be the last one, who would not be ready to suffer pain and death with me for our beloved Master and King."

The King took a long breath, then he opened his arms. "Come to my heart, noble man and friend."

He embraced him. "Can I be called poor, if I own such hearts? Ah, Adlershorst! Your King will no longer be able to reward your faith, but I believe in a future recompense and even here on earth, a divine justice. Let us trust in this!"

"My King, so you can speak at this moment!"

"Yes, at this moment, when the storm sweeps over me and uproots me," added the King earnestly. "Yes, dear friend, God is just, he has found me unworthy, I submit to his wisdom, but surely He will judge them, who condemn me so mercilessly to-day and soil their hands with an act of violence."

He stepped to the window and gazed out.

"And now," he turned again to his aide-de-camp, "I beg you to leave me alone for an hour, I must collect

my thoughts and I have to arrange certain things. As soon as it is time I will call you, to entrust to your friendship some last commissions."

The Count retired without speaking. His eyes were full of tears. It seemed to him like a dying man taking farewell forever of this earthly life.

The King had sunk into his chair before the desk and covered his eyes with his hands. He thus remained a long time.

How the pictures of the past glided before him, numberless, endless. Behind him lay the life, which he could better have made use of. Now every power was taken from him, a sick man, regarded with awe by the people who did not know him, and from whom he, for so many years had withdrawn. Oh, how bitterly he regretted his short-sightedness, which had led him to follow alone his own inclinations. He had not forgotten the priest's warning words: God, who has given you life, alone can take it from you. But there are, he resumed, circumstances, under which life, a continuation of existence, as it lay before him, becomes cowardice. Certainly it was a duty to live as long as there was a possibility of doing good, or for being an example to others. And when the ill-will of man humiliates us in our own eyes and when a kingly crown is changed to a fool's cap, which covers an irresponsible head, then, surely one is allowed to anticipate the hand of nature and to set a limit for himself.

Long ago had he made this resolution. And whom did he pain by his death? Who would mourn for him? His mother? Certainly, but she would find in the piety of her heart the trusting submission which had already

helped her through the pain over this far sadder fate which now threatened him.

For a long time he had been dead to his relatives, by his own fault, that he confessed. As for his people? Perhaps a part of them would weep for him, perhaps? But miss him? Only those who were near to him.

He reached from his breast the medalion and opened it: "There, I shall see you! It was the last word that I heard from your lips, Franciska. The hour approaches, soon, soon! Then we shall both rest from all the sorrow and torment of this world." He took a little package from the secret drawer of the desk, enclosed it and wrote the address of the Count upon it, — then another letter to his uncle, who would be Regent.

"Now all is finished. Still another glance upon this beautiful corner of earth, which I have so loved from childhood."

He pushed the door open and stepped out. It was a lovely spring day. The whole magic of growth and blossom lay over nature and the landscape, he loved so much. By the familiar mountains he was greeted from the distance, by the hills and the woods, through which he had wandered as a boy with blissful heart. He shuddered. — "All gone — alas, I am as one dead even though alive, stricken out of the list of the living. And if dead, why does not heaven mercifully blot out my senses! Why must I still feel this agony! O sweet day, how often shall I still greet you? Better far, to see no more your heavenly light, than to be awakened each morning to curse you! Come on sweet night, your mysterious darkness always was dearer to me than the sharp light of day, before which everything is unveiled

and all hideousness which earth bears is revealed to the eye distinctly. I long for you, I hurry into your arms! — But how? Will they perhaps bar for me this, my last outlet? Will they not consider it their duty to follow the steps of the insane, to protect his miserable existence?"

Restlessly he walked up and down the room. "It must occur while I am still here and not in the power of my enemies." He looked out, seeking the tower, which rose from a steep rock. "A leap from here and I am free. But no — no.

"What gratitude would that be for the love which would give its life for me, that I should leave such a memory clinging to this beautiful place and to all my faithful hearts? And the noble Adlershorst! With what a look of love and sorrow he ever regards me! Shall the horror always follow him of having seen his King lying with shattered head at the foot of this rock, dashed to pieces? A shapeless mass, I, to whom the beautiful was the essence of existence, I, who have sacrificed so much for the cult of beauty? Something else, something else!"

Suddenly his step faltered, his sight failed, he felt faint.

"No weakness now," he murmured. "I must gather strength. They shall find in the wreck a King still."

He hastily touched the bell and ordered the servant to bring him some refreshment. Then he let the chaplain know, that he wished to hear mass in the chapel. "Count Adlershorst may accompany me," he said to old Lippert, "he alone. And tell the good people, who have watched this night in the palace for me, that they may go home. I need them no more."

The old man raised his hands imploringly. "Oh, Your Majesty —"

"No word — it is my will." Soon the bell of the chapel sounded. The King arose. He stepped into the antechamber, which separated his rooms from the chapel, where Count Adlershorst usually awaited him. But who was this? Not Count Adlershorst but a stranger, who stood there and bowed deeply before him. Had he not ordered Count Adlershorst alone to accompany him?

"Who are you?" he demanded of the young man, who regarded him with reverence.

"Von Randau, Your Majesty."

"Randau." The King remembered suddenly. This was the young man, whom the Count had sent from the Capital several months ago, to inform him of his meeting with Prince Ottomar.

A sudden thought flashed through his mind.

"Count Adlershorst? —"

"Count Adlershorst," was the agitated answer, "has charged me to express to Your Majesty his deepest regret, that he could not attend your orders."

"And why not?" interrupted the King hastily, his voice quivering in spite of the control he exercised.

"Your Majesty, Count Adlershorst was arrested a few minutes ago in the name of the regency and carried away to the Capital."

A groan, indescribable in its despairing expression, broke from the King's breast.

"I shall never see him again," said he brokenly.

Then he stepped to the window and pressed his forehead against the glass for a time.

"Have you a report for me from the Count, Herr von Randau?" said he, turning after a while to the young man, who regarded him sadly.

"The Count respectfully begs Your Majesty, to entrust me with the commission, which he awaited from Your Majesty, as he is now unable to perform them."

"The commission? — Yes, yes — I remember." He stepped to the desk, he took up a small sealed package.

"Young man," said he to George with solemnity, "bearing the confidence of Count Adlershorst you have also won mine. So I give into your hands the last chosen souvenir for my friend, and further I beg and charge you to personally deliver this letter to my princely uncle, the Duke Ferdinand, if Count Adlershorst is not free after three days."

George's clear eyes met the King's with sincerity and devotion.

"I will carry out Your Majesty's orders most punctually," he answered, being moved to the depths of his soul.

"Thank you," said the King kindly and drawing a ring from his finger, he handed it to the young man, continuing:

"I have heard from Adlershorst, how unselfishly you have devoted yourself to me. Take this as a token of the gratitude of your King, who is otherwise prevented from expressing his thanks."

George bent over the King's hand in thanks, while a secret tear stood in his eye.

"As long as I live, this gift will be a precious relic," said he with emotion.

The King motioned to him hastily.

"Tell me now, what you know further of the Count's arrest, —" he asked, turning aside.

George complied with this request.

"The Count was in the act of carrying out the kingly orders and about to dismiss the troops, which were under his orders in the Palace Court, when a carriage, accompanied by gendarmes, was seen on the street. The leader of the gendarmes had ridden to the gate and demanded entrance for himself and followers. The Count had immediately stepped out to speak to the gentlemen and to ask their patience, till he could announce their arrival to Your Majesty. But he was scarcely out of the gate, when they surrounded and arrested him in the name of the Duke. They forced him to step immediately into one of the waiting carriages and he was hardly allowed to exchange a word with me, in order to send the message to Your Majesty and later a similar one to the Countess in the chalet."

The King listened eagerly.

Now, as he turned again to George, his face appeared calm.

"I beg you," he said in a peculiarly soft, veiled voice, "not to linger a moment, but attend to the Count's message to his wife. The poor Countess will be very anxious. Comfort her. I believe that I can assure her, that no further calamity will befall him."

George bowed silently, but as he reached the door, the King called him back again.

"Is the Commission sent by the Duke already in the Castle?"

"The gentlemen wait to be received."

"I request you to bring them to me, as soon as the mass is over."

With a fearful heart George went to carry out the received orders; but the King remained motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Let them come," he murmured, "to place on their master the chains so carefully forged. I sneer at their power. Your King's last act will be, to cast these chains at your feet." —

He stepped to the table and pressed the bell.

Immediately came Lippert and opened the doors before the King. The soft sound of the organ came in light waves to the vestibule door through which the King stepped solemnly and with uplifted head into the chapel. The heavy curtains fell behind him.

The chaplain with the assistance of the choir boys celebrated the mass before the altar. The smoke of the incense reached the King, who, kneeling before the *pre-dieu* alone, unseen by mortal eye, his head leaning on his arm as was his custom, communed with his God. The King, the mighty one of earth giving account to the Almighty, before whom all crowns are as dust, to Him, who calls through the Saviour's voice to those in power: 'To whom much is given, of him shall much be required.'

The mass was over and the voice of the organ trembled through the room, dying away like distant celestial music. The King rose and a bright sunbeam came through the chapel window to the lonely man and rested on his forehead, which beamed with transfigured light. All earthly things had fallen from him, his soul was free. —

During this time, the vestibule in which hitherto no one had been allowed, was filled with people. Behind

the heavy window curtains the helmets of the gendarmes glittered. A second Commission from the residence, this time assisted by the doctors, awaited the coming of the King in the great reception hall.

They greeted him with deep reverence and Count Goldberg stepped forward to read a document, which he held in his hands.

The King's eye rested with dark, threatening expression upon the Count, and a bitter smile played over his features. Count Goldberg looked very pale, and his voice trembled. The King stood motionless by and listened to the document. Only when Count Goldberg read aloud the opinion of the physicians, which confirmed his mental disorder, did he wince. At the demand made upon him in the name of the Regency to vacate the Felsenschloss and step at once into the carriage waiting to convey him to the Seeschloss, which had been fixed upon by the physicians as his future residence, did he interrupt the reader with a scornful motion of his hand.

"No further —," with uplifted arm, as if threatening the Commission he took several steps forward, and glanced up and down the row of faces before him, fixing at last his eyes upon Count Goldberg with an expression of unspeakable contempt.

"Wretched traitor!" thundered he, so that the words echoed through the hall. All stepped back, pale with terror. At the same moment, at a sign from the physician, the attendants, who had been stationed behind the door, stepped forward and seized the wrists of the King with a firm grasp. A shudder went through his noble figure — his face bore the pallor of death. Then a wrench, and the attendants were hurled aside, even

those practised watchers of the insane were not equal to the herculean strength of the King.

But no outbreak of madness followed, as they had expected. The King quickly gained control of himself and in a quiet, but husky voice declared himself ready to yield to their demands.

"Proceed, gentlemen, I will follow you." The words sounded so majestically royal, that silently they all obeyed.

Lippert reached the King his hat and mantle.

"Must I also say adieu to you, dear friend?" asked the King kindly, but without the least tremor in his voice.

"God be praised, Your Majesty," answered the true servant gazing at him devotedly as at a saint. "I have obtained permission to still further serve Your Majesty." A smile was the answer, a smile far removed from earth, which seemed to say: "My good man, I shall not need your service long."

As he went out, he turned to the physicians walking at his side, saying:

"You, Sirs, have pronounced an opinion upon me, without even knowing me, without once having examined me. The world will call you to account for this."

He then stepped quietly on.

The servants of the King had gathered at the foot of the stairs; among them the old coachman Martin, who had not been allowed to drive his King and Master to his new Residence, also Sepp und Bärbel and many others who had been informed of the King's expulsion. These stood together weeping, for the gendarmes had

formed a row from the portal to the carriage and did not allow any one to come near.

The King, noticing this arrangement, smiled in the same far away manner as before as though he had done with earthly affairs, and nothing which they could do, would affect him more. The carriage, which had been brought from the Capital by the Commission for his journey, was old and worn. The cushions were tattered and dark curtains were drawn before the barred windows.

The King lingered a moment. He, who in this respect was accustomed to the greatest splendour and luxury, to be forced into this wretched vehicle? — Then, after throwing one last farewell glance at the castle and at the beloved mountains, he stepped quietly in and suffered the doctors' presence without objection.

"Proceed!" his lips murmured. He shut his eyes. "Farewell sweet life, splendour and glory, dear lovely world of my dreams."

A deep sob from those remaining behind followed the departing carriage.

"A funeral!" cried out one woman, "we shall never see our King again."

"No, never again," Bärbel lamented and threw her arm around her faithful Sepp, burying her tear-stained face on his breast. The carriage rocked as it hastened over the mountains on rough, unused paths in order to avoid the frontier, for it was rumoured that a troop of loyalists were assembled on the other side to release their King with or against his will.

There the troops waited until late in the night. At last came Sepp rushing breathlessly to them, crying: "I - is too late, the King is gone!"

The loyal men groaned outright, but they would not yet lay down the weapons, with which they had armed themselves, nor would they give up their hope. As long as the King still lived they need not despair.

Chapter XXIV.

Duke Ferdinand, contrary to his usual custom, still remained in the Capital. The difficult situation in the country made it necessary. The Duke had greatly aged in the last few months. The responsibilities of the proceedings against his nephew had laid upon him a heavy burden. Yet he had never hesitated a moment to courageously carry out what seemed to him demanded. Delay must only increase the distress of the unfortunate sufferer. It seemed to him most merciful to finish the matter at once. One thing he could not overlook, and it consumed his peace, namely that the circumstances here were so unusual, so different from those of other cases, where a similar misfortune had overtaken a royal personage. What elsewhere had taken place quietly in the bosom of the family and had first become known to the public as an accomplished fact, had here happened in a confused and startling manner, giving the appearance of violence in regard to the unfortunate man.

The King denied that he was ill, and what was more serious, a greater part of the people held to this opinion. In spite of his long absence from the City the once so beloved figure of the youthful Monarch was still in the hearts of all. They could not be reconciled, that this pride of the nation, who had arisen like a meteor in ra-

diant splendour, should now, in the prime of his manhood, be extinguished. It was all the more difficult to believe as they had known for years and become accustomed to all these peculiarities, which had now been made the chief cause of the action against him. And now this climax — armed peasants, defending the King against the Commission sent to him from the Duke, the Commission itself arrested. Count Goldberg, who had sought an audience, was therefore not too graciously received, even though he brought the assuring news, that the King without much resistance had submitted to his fate and had arrived safely at the Seeschloss.

"You could have fulfilled your mission with more tact, and to speak plainly, Count Goldberg, I expected it from you, who are one of the few, whom my nephew had honoured with his favour. This absurd farce of imprisonment should have been avoided under all circumstances. It is a scandal for the whole world."

Count Goldberg turned away. "We had not the power to prevent this, Your Highness," said he deprecatingly. "We had not imagined that we should find ourselves facing a well organized band of armed troops."

"Armed troops? That is the trouble! How it could be possible to organize an armed body and nothing be done to prevent it! You should have called out the militia."

"To besiege Felsenschloss? Your Highness yourself had strictly ordered, that we should proceed with moderation and without violence."

"Ah, but", muttered the Duke, "it need not have come to that, but these gentlemen surely lacked courage. That is the point."

"Your Highness is mistaken," remarked the Count. "We stood opposed to most decided men, who had for their leader the thoroughly capable Count Adlershorst."

The Duke replied: "Alas, I see how I have failed by my too great indulgence. But now the daring man is behind the bars."

Count Goldberg could not conceal his joyful surprise at these news.

"Do not triumph too much on this account," continued the Duke scornfully. "However much I disdain the Count as a leader of state affairs, as a man, I cannot do that. He has shown a wonderful loyalty to his Master, and I wish I might also boast of as true subjects."

Count Goldberg had turned pale. He answered excitedly: "Count Adlershorst is to be envied for the cleverness with which he carries out his plans without losing the favour of his superiors."

"I fear, Count Goldberg," answered the Duke sharply, "that envy of your rival in the King's favour has influenced you more than your real convictions in this matter."

"Your Highness judges me very harshly, if you attribute the whole occurrence at Felsenschloss to my awkwardness."

The Duke looked at him gloomily and said at last: "You may be right. Perhaps I have been unjust. But one becomes confused and distracted by all that has taken place. Do not take too seriously what I have said under excitement. I shall never forget the services, Count Goldberg, which you have rendered me. You may depend upon my word."

He dismissed the Count with a movement of his hand. The latter withdrew with inner resentment. "That is the gratitude of the great," muttered he, "and for this I have put myself in danger of having a ball driven into me by the arrogant Adlershorst, — to say nothing of losing the favour of the charming Eva. Suppose I turn the tables. Suppose I recant and seek to recover again the throne for the King? So long as he still lives and breathes, he may at any moment regain power, and then, my dear Duke, you will reckon with me for this hour."

Immediately after Count Goldberg withdrew, the Duke was told that Baroness Ebersdorf had been twice during the day at the Castle and that she now begged urgently for an audience.

"For heaven's sake," muttered the Duke. "What does this intrigue want of me? To worm some secret out of me like the others of her set." Nevertheless he gave orders to admit her. The former friend of Prince Henry deserved consideration. Besides this, she was the confidant of Justice von Gleichen and might have something important to communicate.

The Duke could hardly believe his eyes, as she entered. What had changed this distinguished beauty, this woman so feared and so envied? She looked strikingly pale and her drooping eyes spoke of sleepless, perhaps tearful nights.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit, Baroness?" asked he, deeply touched by her unusual appearance.

Instead of answering she threw herself passionately at his feet.

"What does this mean?" asked he surprised, stepping back.

"Your Highness," said she tremblingly, stretching her hands appealingly up to him, "a penitent kneels before you and begs for forgiveness, for mercy."

The Duke frowned. "Baroness," said he: "I beg you to get up at once and then we can talk to each other. The mistakes of a beautiful woman are certainly not of so serious a nature, that they cannot be forgiven."

Ludmilla obeyed and took the seat, which the Duke indicated for her.

His countenance was full of weariness and impatience.

"Now, please," said he, "let us speak."

"Your Highness, I have a confession to make. Blinded by passion, driven by error, I have hated the King and worked for his ruin in conjunction with that unscrupulous man, Justice von Gleichen."

The Duke's brow clouded. "If you have anything to accuse yourself of in regard to His Majesty, you must arrange that with your spiritual confessor. I have neither the time nor the authority to receive such confessions."

"But Your Highness alone possesses the power to undo the wrong."

"Who says to you, that I have this power?" exclaimed the Duke his face glowing with excitement. "If you had desired to prevent mischief, you should have spoken sooner. There is no escape now, however much I might wish it."

Despairingly she wrung her hands. "O, Your Highness can still do much, very much," implored she, "if you only would prevent any use of force against the unfor-

fortunate Monarch until an actual medical consultation should pronounce a decisive judgment!"

"Care will be taken for all that," answered he coldly, "without the aid of your peculiar confession."

"Ah, so you will allow His Majesty to remain at Felsenschloss? You will not remove him from there?" pleaded she.

"What a strange question. Do you not know that the King has already been removed to the Seeschloss?"

A suppressed cry came from her lips.

"To the Seeschloss, with all its terrible associations? Ah Your Highness, I see at once, there will be a tragedy!"

The Duke's face twitched angrily.

"You are nervous, Baroness, and allow yourself to be tortured unnecessarily by your fancies. The King is there under the safe protection of his physician and attendants."

"Who nevertheless cannot hinder him from carrying out the firm intention, which I read in his eyes the day, he listened to Mozart's Requiem in the Chapel of Felsenschloss."

"What intention?"

"To die rather than to submit to force."

"Well, then now, have the proof that you did not read correctly the language of the King's eyes, however intimate your former knowledge of them may have been, as I happen to remember. The King submitted most patiently to the inevitable."

"Apparently. One cannot know the outcome."

"That knowledge is certainly denied to us mortals," answered the Duke with decisive tone. "We do what

duty demands, that must suffice, must indeed suffice for me."

She was dismissed. Entirely crushed she left the palace. All had been in vain. Heaven did not permit her to make good her too late repented sin. She sank back into the cushions of her carriage entirely exhausted. She was distracted by tormenting thoughts. Was it then possible, as the Duke had said, that she had read more in the melancholy face of the King than there was in reality?

Would he really indifferently, without resistance submit to the ignominy of passing his days as an insane man within the walls of Lake Castle, until death should free him?

Her inmost soul answered No. Not so could this ideal nature end, not so. The tragedy had already begun, the future lay concealed in darkness.

Arriving at her house she was surprised by a hurried rushing to and fro of her servants. They informed her that the Baron had just arrived from Gundersbach, and, indeed, there he stood in the door of her salon pulling nervously at his moustache. He called out to her in his droning voice.

"At last, *ma chère*! I have already waited an hour for you."

"You here?" answered she astonished. "May I ask, what has brought you here?"

He banged the door behind her, as she entered and answered irritably:

"On the contrary, I should like to ask, *ma bien aimée*, how you, in such unquiet times could run off without

ceremony and leave me alone in Gundersbach. I waited with the servant hour after hour for your return from the Felsenschloss, but you did not come. At last the empty carriage returned, and the servant handed me your note. 'I am going to town', I read, but no other word of explanation. Good, said I, she has always had her own way, so let her go. But to-day it was too much for me. You, who know everything, have probably heard from your Justice von Gleichen what is going on and know how to bring yourself cleverly into security, but me you leave there exposed to all insults, all disgrace. Was that not enough to make my blood boil?"

His voice had taken on a shriek, which repelled Ludmilla uncommonly. Shrugging her shoulders she answered her husband with her accustomed coolness.

"I understand nothing of what you are saying. Pray, explain yourself. I am not conscious of having left you in any danger."

"In no danger?" But you know that they have removed the King from Felsenschloss?"

"Certainly — but what more?"

"And that the Devil is to pay there."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The whole region is in rebellion! From the upper and lower villages, from Hirschau to Gundersbach, they are in arms. They wish to free the King and take him back to Felsenschloss. They collected their forces about our villa, clenched their fists, and threatened our windows shouting: 'Down with the enemies of the King!'" I do not know what would have happened, had not Paula arrived at this moment from the Schweizerhaus with

Herr von Randau. He succeeded at last in quieting the mob."

Ludmilla's eyes brightened at this report of the Baron. She felt relieved of a great weight.

"So all is not yet lost —", thought she, "still perhaps it is possible to rescue the King."

"And Count Adlershorst," asked she, "did he nothing for your safety?"

The Baron opened his eyes widely.

"But, my dear, do you not know, that Adlershorst has been arrested?"

"Arrested?" Ludmilla started up.

"Yes, Herr von Randau was present and brought Paula the news as well as that of the removal of the King."

"And how did she take it, poor child?"

"Remarkably composed. She appeared more excited by the removal of the King than by the arrest of her husband."

"And Paula has remained in Schweizerhaus?"

The Baron impatiently shrugged his shoulders.

"How you question, my dear. I came here with her. She hopes to undertake something here for His Majesty. We first took Herr von Randau in our carriage to the Forestry on the Lake. He wished to consult with the old forester as to what might still be done, as your cousin, Herr von Feldau, remains so entirely reserved. Ha ha! He is clever, but these simple people are willing to risk their lives for nothing. Now that they once have the King, they will certainly not let him go again."

Here the Baron chuckled and rubbed his hands maliciously.

Ludmilla answered not. One thought alone rushed through her soul. "If he could only be freed, how I should thank God on bended knee. Might that not also be a rescue for me, a redemption from the fearful sins of my life?" —

Chapter XXV.

The beautiful, smiling spring sun, hitherto shining so warm and alluring on the streets and squares of the Capital, suddenly vanished behind thick clouds.. Leaden and heavy hung the heavens over the high houses, softly fell the rain and the whole earth seemed enveloped in a mourning mantle.

A gray picture in a gray frame — so seemed the beautiful expanse of springtime flowers in the splendid gardens of Prince Henry's Palace, and with melancholy eyes Princess Henry looked out from her salon upon it all.

"If I could only help you, my dear Countess," she said turning to Paula, who sat opposite her on a low taboret, "but I seem to think in vain. If things had gone as I wished, much of this would not have taken place. But I am utterly helpless, my voice dies away quite unheard."

Paula bowed, her pale, charming face was full of care, her hands crossed in her lap in a nervous unrest.

"If your Highness would ask the Duke once more?" she implored.

"I have tried everything, my dear, and repeatedly," interrupted the Princess. "But we women have far too weak hearts, and do not rightly understand the great questions of State. Believe me, the Duke will do his best, and if what he does, seems hard, it is only that he has, with great self-control, harkened to the voice of necessity. Indeed the people who look upon us so distrustfully, little realize how much had to be gone through with in the Royal family before they arrived at this point. The King's many good qualities are appreciated by us all, even by the Duke, though he is opposed to many of the King's views. I, especially, esteem him; indeed he has always been very favorably disposed toward me. I have received much kindness from him, many proofs of his noble, benevolent spirit. On that account I suffer more than I dare to say by the sad fate, that has overtaken him."

"But my husband is of another opinion," ventured Paula, "and he has been so much with the King. Nervous, exceedingly nervous is he certainly and his life of solitude has made him seem peculiar. But the beautiful qualities of his heart, he has never lost. If it were otherwise, would my husband thus devote himself, heart and soul to the King? Would he have risked his life, his freedom, without a thought, for one who was really mentally deranged?"

An expression of yet greater pain passed over the face of the Princess.

"You may be sure, my dear Countess, that I esteem your husband very highly for the very reason that he has shown himself so devoted to my unfortunate cousin. But love overlooks what is quickly visible to an impar-

tial eye. Moreover you may rest easy concerning the fate of the Count. I know that the Duke fully appreciates the honorable disposition, that has caused him to transgress the law. If this transgression must be punished, the punishment will certainly be very mild."

A sigh was Paula's answer.

"The Count would willingly bear a much severer penalty, if through it, he could be of some service to the King. And if he deeply deplores the loss of his freedom now, it is for the most part because he knows how greatly His Majesty will miss having near him in this hard time the trusted face of a friend, because he knows, how necessary it is that a true and devoted one should watch over him."

"Yes, yes, I understand that," replied the Princess. "Perhaps if he tried to present it to the Duke in writing?"

"Your Highness, that has already been done, but the Duke has refused the request most decidedly."

"How do you know?" objected the Princess, hesitatingly.

"At my request I was allowed to visit my husband in his imprisonment. While I was with him he showed me the Duke's answer."

"Then indeed, there is nothing more to do," replied the Princess, visibly pained by what she had heard. "In any case the Duke will not act without good reasons. Moreover the King seems to have quite submitted to his destiny, the most comforting news has been sent out from the Seeschloss."

"Yes, but my husband is greatly concerned. He is convinced, that His Majesty contemplates suicide."

"That we do not fear in the least," answered the Princess excitedly. "And even, if it were the case, he is so carefully watched that it would be impossible for him to carry out the idea. Moreover, the Duke has told me, that steps have been taken to call in some prominent physicians from outside, who will repeatedly observe the King, and that all succeeding actions taken will be governed by their final verdict. And so, perhaps, we can hope for improvement, indeed, if God will, for complete restoration, as soon as with a suitable course of treatment an entire change in the King's manner of living can be begun. Tell the Count this, when next you visit him, it may relieve his apprehension somewhat."

"Your Highness is so exceedingly kind," said Paula, sadly bowing over the Princess's hand, "that I am almost ashamed to confess that I find no comfort in all that you have condescended to impart to me. However I shall not fail to inform the Count of your soothing assurances."

"Assurances? No, only hopes, dear Countess."

And as Paula, instead of answering, sighed heavily, the Princess added, somewhat vexed:

"You do not share these hopes?"

"No, Your Highness, I do not share them. I know through my husband only too well how this enforced cure will be lost through the peculiar nature of the King."

"And yet, without force he has not found the strength to change his manner of living."

"They should have given him time to see the necessity for such a change."

"If he has not seen the necessity during a twenty

years' reign? No, no, dear Countess, we must trust those, who know best. They have acted through necessity, yes, through sad necessity."

And with a friendly inclination of her head, she pressed a kiss upon the brow of the Countess, who courted deeply.

"Courage, dear Countess, we will lay our cause in the hand of the Highest."

The Princess did not see, how bitterly the lips of the Countess quivered as she passed out. How easy it is to commend courage, when no hand bestirs itself to avert a threatening evil! And yet Paula knew what true sympathy the Princess now felt, and had always felt, for the King; that she, in fact, had always taken sides with him against the Duke himself and against her own husband. But as she could change nothing, it seemed to afford her some comfort to interpret what had taken place as being justified, as showing unqualified political wisdom.

Greatly cast down the young Countess returned to her dwelling, where everything recalled the kindness of her unhappy King. This house furnished in the finest and most artistic taste, was a present from their royal friend. Here she had spent the first happy months of her wedded life. How lonely, how forsaken it appeared to her now. Only a few rooms in the upper story had been hastily prepared for her, as they had not expected to again take up their residence here until the winter.

On entering, the porter informed her, that a lady had just called, who had declared that she would wait

for the return of the Countess. While on the stairs, Paula could distinguish both, a feminine and a masculine voice, the latter that of the servant, who seemed undecided whether or not to show the guest into the reception-room. Paula's appearance put an end to his doubt. And now the lady threw back her veil and Paula recognized to her astonishment her former governess, Emma Waldow. In a somewhat cool, yet not unfriendly manner, she extended her hand to the governess, who blushed slightly as she took it.

"Please come nearer," said the Countess and directed a servant to take the guest's wet cloak.

"I come on a special mission, Countess," began Emma Waldow timidly, trembling with nervous excitement. The beloved face, so white and changed, touched her deeply and it pained her, that she dared not show the unchanged, heartfelt love she felt for her former pupil, for since that disastrous event, Paula, repelled, had held herself at a distance.

"A commission from Herr von Feldau perhaps?" inquired Paula sinking wearily into an easy chair opposite Emma.

"Not Herr von Feldau," replied Emma with downcast eyes, "I have left the Hunting Lodge for ever."

Paula started up in astonishment.

"What, you have been able to tear yourself away from the pupils who have grown so dear to you and from kind Frau von Feldau?"

"After the Forstmeister heard about my guilty past, he felt he must let me go," answered Emma with averted face. "However my errand does not concern myself," she continued, "but is an important commu-

nication for you, with which Herr von Randau has entrusted me."

"For me? that means for my husband," exclaimed Paula; "what misfortune now?"

"None, God willing. But yesterday I met Herr von Randau at the mountain station. He had been at the lake Forestry."

"Yes, we accompanied him there yesterday in our carriage," interrupted Paula, "I am anxious to know more about what took place."

Emma Waldow bent nearer.

"To report that, I am here. Very important things are in preparation there. The old forester is in spite of his years all fire and flame. He swears he will not let them take his hereditary Lord and King, and that he will free him from the hands of his enemies even against his own will. Already a number of like-minded men have gathered around the forester, and perhaps this very night an attempt will be made to deliver the King out of the power of his guards."

Paula shook her head sadly.

"It will all be in vain, I fear. The good, true men will plunge themselves into ruin without accomplishing anything. The King is so closely guarded that all such attempts will be thwarted."

"Yet, perhaps not," answered Emma. "The valet Lippert has been taken into confidence and the number of guards is not so great as one might think. The Duke seems not to wish a too severe confinement and places entire confidence in the physicians."

Paula cast a searching look upon Emma Waldow.

"You seem to be remarkably well informed," she

said. The blood rushed to Emma's cheeks, as she thought, she detected in Paula's languid tone distrust of the former spy.

"I have been so well informed through Herr von Randau," she stammered with confusion and added harshly, "he trusts me."

Paula's tender heart repented at once.

"Pardon me," she apologized with her characteristic, lovely frankness. "It was unkind of me, to speak so. It certainly was. But if you only knew, how I feel! Ah, I am no more the Paula, I once was, the blindly trusting, devoted child!"

"And you have a right to distrust me," joined in Emma sadly. "I dare not complain, for every sin demands penance."

She rose to go; but Paula held her back.

"No, no, you cannot leave me so. You came to me for a good purpose, to perform a service for my husband, and I have not once asked you where you live, what you are doing, and what your future plans are."

Emma let herself be drawn back into her seat.

"You really have some interest in me still, Countess Paula?"

Her eyes overflowed with tears, though she herself was unconscious of it.

"Emma, my second mother!" cried Paula, with new awakened tenderness. "Chide me for ingratitude. I deserve it, but do not weep. Ah, my heart is already so anxious and heavy, do not cast a new burden upon it!"

"Poor child," said Emma fervently, "so young and yet so sorely tried."

The bands of suspicion were suddenly loosed from

Paula's young heart by the warm sympathy of that one, to whom for many years she had fled with every grief and sorrow, that one, who had been her only confidant. Sobbing she leaned her head on Emma's breast and wept bitterly.

Emma Waldow spoke not a word. She only pressed Paula's head more tenderly to her bosom and gently stroked the soft hair; all was again as in the past, and in a torrent of words, Paula told Emma all her griefs; how, since her arrival in the city, she had tried to accomplish something in behalf of the King and for her husband; how she, that very morning, had seen her husband in his prison and that he had spoken scarcely a syllable in regard to his own future, but had thought only of his beloved Master. He had requested her to beg the intercession of Princess Henry, that he might be allowed to return to the King, now so entirely forsaken, but her efforts had been in vain.

They looked at each other sadly.

"I do not know," lamented Paula, "I am unable to grasp any hope from this plan to free the King, of which you tell me. If word could only be sent out to these brave men, begging them to wait, until I could speak with my husband and get his advice."

"That would be impossible," broke in Emma Waldow. "They are quite determined to act at once, for they entertain dark fears in regard to the King and see danger in delay."

"Does Herr von Randau believe this?"

"Yes, and he is the last person, with whom His Majesty has spoken."

"And he fears —?"

"That the King considers himself lost."

"My husband fears the same," said Paula solicitously, "he fears the same." And after a pause, she continued:

"Good, true Randau — he will sacrifice himself as my husband has sacrificed himself. —"

"I fear so, too," said Emma with trembling lips.

"Emma, Emma," cried Paula looking searchingly into the face of the governess. "Confess it, you care for young Randau, I surmised this long ago!"

Emma sat with eyes cast down, her heart beating almost audibly.

"O Emma, do confide in me. You love him, and he?"

"And he loves me," came in accents as of shame from Emma's lips.

"And this is the first you tell me of it?" reproached Paula, again embracing the blushing young woman. "Yes, now I understand, what has changed you so. It is the holy power of love. Really, I will no longer doubt you. Who loves, who truly loves, he must indeed be good."

"Yes, he must be good," repeated Emma, "and if I have indeed struggled out of the night into which life had plunged me, I owe it to him, my George. But the fulfilment of our hopes lies far distant, and on that account I have said nothing to you, dearest Paula."

"He is still so young," said Paula, "but the years of waiting will quickly pass. Oh, as I rejoice over you, what a ray of light shines in the darkness of these days. But now you must not go away from me. Will you not have pity on the desolate one and remain here?"

"Do you really wish it?" asked Emma hesitatingly.

"To keep you with me? Certainly."

"But what will your parents say to it: Your step-mother? It was she, who determined Herr von Feldau to send me from his home."

"I thought as much," cried Paula scornfully. "So much the more is it my duty to make good the debt, the Baroness owes you." When she spoke of Ludmilla, she had, for some time called her the Baroness, and not "mother" as formerly.

"But your husband?" objected Emma anew. "He feels an aversion toward me, I know it."

"He will lose it as soon as he learns, that you are engaged to George von Randau."

Chapter XXVI.

In the great banqueting hall of one of the finest hotels of the Capital, a gay company had gathered. It was late in the evening, after a concert, which had been given in the Royal Opera house for a benevolent object.

The committee, at whose head stood Prince Ottomar together with many great names of the land, were giving a supper as a testimony of their gratitude to the artists, who had kindly taken part; among them was Madame Eva, who had again through her glorious, soulful performance reaped the most laurels. Yet her countenance did not show its usual gayety, she looked strangely earnest and pale. This was noticed by all present as she entered the hall on the arm of her friend of many years, Director Albert, who, it was whispered, had finally succeeded in conquering the artist's disinclination for another

marriage and had at last won her consent. Although many believed that Madame Eva had placed herself so assiduously under Albert's protection, only in order to keep other unwelcome suitors at a distance. As she saw Count Goldberg, also a member of the committee, attempting to draw near her, she paled slightly, and turned to other acquaintances, openly avoiding his greeting. He, however, would not be dismayed. He offered her his arm, saying with deprecating politeness:

"I remember former times, when the *Prima donna* Eva distinguished me with her friendship, and did me the honor to choose me as her cavalier at table."

However, she did not accept the offered arm.

"That must be a mistake, Count Goldberg," said she, "which I beg you to correct."

He bit his lips nervously, "You will not be so cruel," he whispered hotly in her ear. "I am consumed with longing to speak again with you face to face."

"I do not know, what Count Goldberg can have to say to me," she answered coldly, "when all relations between us are at an end."

"But, when I tell you," he implored, "that I have gone over to the other side, that I am ready to make everything good?"

"To make good? Now? You are pleased to joke, Count. And if it were so?" she continued with cutting irony, "you must know, that one prefers to avoid people who too often change the flag under which they sail."

"You are very bitter, fair lady," he answered somewhat incensed; "yet for the sake of the cause I wish to serve, and in which my service may not be without worth, I will not remember what you have just said."

Yet you should not spurn a penitent, who has come, though late, to a knowledge of his guilt. And indeed I hope, it is not too late."

"Decidedly too late, Count Goldberg." And with cutting scorn she continued: "Perhaps the service you gave the other side was not enough appreciated, nor well enough rewarded, since you all at once play the penitent. You should have known that one sometimes loves and makes use of treachery, while the traitor himself is despised."

The blood rushed to the Count's head and he involuntarily gripped at his side, where he had formerly carried a sword.

"You go too far," cried he furiously and turned abruptly away.

At this moment Prince Ottomar came in, very conveniently diverting the attention from this not unnoticed rebuff to the Count. He looked very gay and moved about among the company unceremoniously. He did not neglect to express to Madame Eva his appreciation of her artistic performance. She bowed deeply, but no word of reponse came from her lips. The Prince waited a few moments and then with contracted brow moved on.

Eva beckoned to Albert who hastened to her side. As she took his arm, she said resentfully:

"He can be gay, can laugh, this prince, at a time when such a tragedy is being enacted in his family. It is revolting."

"But, dearest lady," said Albert seeking to appease her. "You take the affair entirely too tragically. At the Lake Castle everything is going on surprisingly well. And then everyone knows, how little sympathy thes:

two cousins have had always for each other. If the Prince should play a solicitous part now, it would be rank hypocrisy."

"You are as bad as the others. I had expected better things of you," she cried indignantly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If we could change anything by becoming indignant. But if we tried to resist with hands and feet, all would go on as before. One must try to be reconciled to the inevitable."

"And renounce all feeling, all human sentiment? Rather bite out one's tongue than speak a word against this unrighteousness, and when this sun is sinking, from which we heretofore have received light and life, to turn about without thought or scruple to another newly rising one! This is called worldly wisdom, and those who think and act otherwise, are termed fools. Do you know, Albert, whom I envy to-day? Count Adlershorst in his prison and his lovely wife. They can carry their heads high, can look proudly down on all of us."

"I fear," interrupted Alfred, "that the poor Countess does not think herself to be envied and that in private, she weeps many a tear over the husband thus torn from her."

"You think that," she interrupted him sharply, "because you do not know the love of a woman, a high-minded woman like the Countess. And even if she must lose all, name and splendor, property and personal possessions, her pride in such a man will recompense her for all, will make her the happiest of her sex."

The choirmaster laughed.

"You are a visionary, fair Eva, a lovely visionary.

At first, one of the strongest opponents of 'this woman-hating King, this invisible patron of art, then suddenly one of his most ardent adherents. Let us seek to find a middle-course, my dear, if we wish to walk safely on our way."

As he had thus spoken, half jestingly, half ironically, she turned her face angrily from him, yet suffered him to lead her to the table.

The Prince was already seated by the side of the newly engaged Coloratura singer, a fair and youthful woman, with sparkling black eyes and captivating dimples in her cheeks, who had inflamed his susceptible heart at her first appearance on the royal stage. She took his homage with the gratitude due to a prince, but she knew that she must keep him at a distance. This however, only charmed him the more and whenever he was in her vicinity he had neither eye nor ear for anyone else. Absorbed in raillery he did not notice what was passing on about him, that there was a sudden excitement in the antechamber. A messenger from the Duke had inquired for the Prince. Bowing respectfully, the host finally ventured to address the Prince and quietly whispered a few words in his ear. The Prince arose in sudden fright. He grew pale, horror and dismay were written on his face. Without a moment's consideration, without as so much as a word to his charming neighbor, he rushed from the hall. At the table sat the guests, their heads together in anxious conference. With pale and disturbed faces they stared into each other's eyes — this company, that had just been so gay. What had happened? Would they be informed? Would the Prince return? But moment after moment sped by in vain waiting.

Finally the host appeared and made the excuses of His Highness. He had just received disturbing news, which had called him to the Duke.

"To the Duke? And in the night?"

They sprang from the table, surrounding the host. All thoughts were as by lightning directed to one point. Something disastrous had occurred in Lake Castle. The host directed the Duke's adjutant in whispers to get ready to accompany the Prince to the station, where the Duke was already waiting to set out for the Castle. In the last half hour the host had succeeded in extracting some information from the court lackey, who had brought the message: namely that the Chief of Police with other officers of the Crown had gone on in advance.

In the meantime some of the gentlemen present had hurried out to the street to get what information they could. Now they returned with lips white as chalk and with trembling knees. The physician's servant, who had been called from his bed by order of the Chief of Police to accompany him to the Seeschloss, had not been silent. A message of horror went through the hall. "The King is dead, drowned in the lake!" They all sat as if paralyzed in their places.

"The King dead!" They had feared this, had foreboded it. The very ones, who before with so much calmness and credulity, had prophecied a favorable turn of events, now confessed with white lips that this end had indeed been expected. They stared blankly at each other.

On the wall of this room dedicated to gay pleasure an invisible hand had written: "Mene, mene, tekel." The faces that had glowed with joy grew white, the arrogant eyes swam in tears. Count Goldberg had fled

from the hall as though pursued by furies. His face buried in his hands, he lay prone upon a reclining chair in the dimly lighted adjoining chamber. Like the last judgment's trumpet reverberated in his ears the accusing cry: "Judas! Traitor to thy Lord and benefactor!"

Madame Eva alone seemed noticeably composed. The sudden blow had at first stunned her. But when she finally succeeded in collecting herself, a feeling of relief stole over her.

"He is released," she thought. "He has slipped off the chains that bound and degraded him. A King in life, a King also in death."

She expressed herself thus as she walked with Albert through the quiet streets of the sleeping city, the city sleeping unconscious of this awful calamity. Albert shaken and trembling, listened to her in wonder.

"You, who a short time ago, were so grievously agitated, you can speak so calmly of the event, which has come as unexpectedly as a flash of lightning and has left us all prostrate."

"I speak so, because I saw this end, foreboded it. Therefore my previous agitation, which I felt as long as there was a possibility of averting this end, has become my resignation, now, that the inevitable has occurred. And moreover, who would wish to lament the one, who has taken this great step, who has cast from him the earthly with its unrest and its imperfections? Above all this one, whose kingly crown has long since become a crown of thorns, pressing with intolerable weight upon his head. Vanished are all the shadows, that dimmed the pure picture of him in life. Through this tragic fate, he will shine with brighter lustre in the

love of the people, will live in the memory of posterity, and all will recognize what they have lost in him."

And it resulted as Madame Eva had predicted. Like a whirlwind the news of the King's tragic end surged through the world, arousing everywhere sympathy, indignation and horror. If he, who had seemed destined for the greatest glory, who had risen on the horizon as a burst of morning sunlight, filling all hearts with new hope, if he could be thus destroyed before his time, who, then was safe? But no one felt the unexpected, awful occurrence so keenly as Duke Ferdinand. His thoughts came in quick succession: Were the warnings given me really true? Have I been deceived? Should we have given the sick man milder and more respectful treatment, or was he really not so ill, as they tried to make me believe?

When in the Seeschloss he looked upon the face of his nephew, white in death and yet beautiful, the dark brows drawn together, the lips tightly closed, he seemed to see there an accusing look. Returning from the Castle he rode through the streets of the Capital by the side of his son, Prince Henry, who, utterly unstrung, leaned back weakly in the carriage, and as, at the sight of the Duke, many of the agitated crowd broke out into loud lamentations and weeping, while others turned from him in dark silence, he felt, that he too was accused, and a heavy weight settled upon his heart. Prince Henry sought refuge and comfort with his children and his wife who, though most deeply affected, was gently resigned, but the Duke shut himself in his apartments for hours, at a time refusing admittance even to his relations.

In the houses of the state ministers the same excite-

ment reigned as in the Castle. The people were most violently agitated. The distinguished physician, who had been chosen to treat the Monarch's case, had perished with him, also a victim of the lake. How it came about no one knew, as no witnesses were to be found.

Like a dark riddle the horror weighed upon the city and the entire country. Excited groups collected around the grave of the deceased physician. They laid the burden of what had happened upon him and many wild threats were raised against even his dead body. — Now the important thing was justification before the world, which horrified, demanded an explanation. The State must prove that the right thing had been done, that no one was responsible for the sad end.

Upon the first knowledge of the disaster, Justice von Gleichen had been summoned to Minister von Feldheim, who received him with grimly knitted brows.

"Do you know that the document you have given me, must by command of the Duke receive the severest examination? Are you quite sure that everything within it can stand the light of truth?"

"Your Excellency may rest assured," answered Herr von Gleichen, though the expression on his face gave the lie to his words, for he looked pale and disturbed. "The proofs are indisputable, and", he continued, stepping nearer, "we should be satisfied at all events, for we have attained what we have striven for with so much pains. The King's rule is at an end."

The minister made a gesture of repulsion.

"But not in this way. — Through such a death! — That we have not desired."

"No," agreed the Justice, "that we have not desired.

But fortunately, destiny has solved the problem of our country. Now we have the power in our own hands, and we must hold it fast under all circumstances in our country's interest."

"Yes, we must keep the power, cost what it will," said the minister quietly to himself.

The Justice's burning eyes questioned the countenance of the minister anxiously.

"Yes, cost what it will. I promise your Excellency still further faithful service."

"Good, I shall count on you," said the minister, nodding to him knowingly, "and shall know better than formerly how to secure your advice and assistance. My first counsellor, who was an enthusiastic adherent of the deceased King, has sent in his resignation. I shall propose your name for the position."

A look of triumph passed over Justice von Gleichen's face. He bowed gratefully and made further assurances of devotion.

"Your Excellency may count on me. Not a shadow shall fall on the measures, which the government has been forced to adopt —"

The minister nodded graciously.

"I'll see you soon, my dear Staatsrat."

As Herr von Gleichen passed on his homeward way the palace of Duke Ferdinand, he almost ran into the young forester von Randau, who was just stepping within the gate of the Palace.

The Justice greeted him cordially.

"Whither so fast, my young friend?"

George coldly lifted his hat. He felt an aversion for the sneak, on whom he laid the chief blame for the King's death.

"Herr von Gleichen must certainly see that I am going to have an audience with His Highness."

"Ah, congratulations! — The rays of the new sun are shining on you, also?"

George flushed.

"No, indeed, I am only performing a confidential mission."

"A confidential mission, entrusted to so young a man? Might one know?" and stepping nearer he whispered: "Be careful. You have compromised yourself in the lost cause of the dead King. I warn you. Now it behoves all, who are in the public service to leave the past and begin a new life. Throw from you every thought of the past, and I will help you to go forward in your career in spite of all."

George's face darkened and his lips curled contemptuously:

"I understand," he answered coldly. "You would like to stop my mouth, would like to keep me silent about what I have heard and seen, but you are mistaken in me. I do not belong to the men who can be bought, who sacrifice their convictions for gain. And now adieu."

The Justice's lips curled in a sneering laugh.

"Insolent youth," he murmured, "you must be tamed."

Yes, that was his consolation, his conviction. He did not believe in good, nor in unselfish loyalty and devotion. If he had believed in it, what would he now be in his own eyes!

As George entered, the Duke was standing before his writing desk leaning heavily upon it. His back was toward George, and he took no notice of him for some

seconds. Finally he turned, sighing, passing his hand across his brow and looked absently upon the young man, who was respectfully bowing before him. How changed was his appearance. He looked much older, deep furrows were in his brow, his whitening beard and broad shoulders were bowed as under a heavy load.

"You bring me something from my nephew, the late King?" asked he at last.

"Yes, Your Highness. — His Majesty deigned to deliver this missive to me, to be given to you with my own hand."

The Duke seized the paper with a trembling hand and laid it on his writing desk.

"You were in His Majesty's service?" he asked after a short pause.

"No, your Highness, I am a student of Forstmeister von Feldau."

"Forstmeister von Feldau! — Ah indeed," and the Duke nodded as though remembering something. And, in fact, there suddenly rose before him a vision of that singer, whom the King had loved so well in his youthful days. He saw also the old Forester Wallburg, who had always been so opposed to him, and so fanatically devoted to the King, and he remembered that this man's daughter had married a relation of the late Countess Mario. All had been friends of the King, and were his, the Duke's, enemies and this young man was one of them. He looked a moment searchingly into George's face. What frankness and integrity lay therein, what loyalty!

He had been told, that young Randau had been one of the most refractory during the last occurrences at Felsenschloss, and was also a rebel against State author-

ity, but yet, he could not be angry with him. How much to be envied was the one, to whom such true hearts belonged.

"Good," he said, dismissing the young man with a motion of his hand. "You have had the confidence of His Majesty. I will keep you in mind." George bowed low. The Duke's favor at this time gave him more anxiety than joy. But now he dared to believe, that no one would accuse him for having taken the part of the King. The Duke sank back in his chair, took up the missive George had brought him, but could not bring himself to open it. The inscription was written in the bold, proud hand of the dead King, he knew it only too well. What had the King to say to him from out of the grave?

Finally he compelled himself to open the seal. There were only a few lines, a plea for forgiveness and impunity for all, who, out of devotion to him, had overstepped the law, especially for his best and truest friend, Count von Adlershorst. "As I also forgive them, who, through error, have sinned against me."

"Through error?"

How mild was this accusation and yet how crushing for him, the brother of the dead King's father, for even he had not known, how to protect the King from this calamity.

The Duke's eyes were wet:

"He has forgiven."

There was but one thing he could do in atonement for the terrible mistakes, and that was to comply as far as possible with the expressed wishes of the dead. With a trembling hand he reached for a pen and wrote

a hasty order to the Cabinet, that the investigation in regard to the insurrection in the mountains cease, and that Count von Adlershorst be given his freedom at once.

He then pressed the bell and with a sigh of relief gave the paper to a servant with the order that it be sent immediately.

Chapter XXVII.

The body of the King was lying in state in his palace in the Capital. Thousands streamed in to see his face once more, and to pay him the last honors. The lonely man, the recluse, who had with such reserve avoided the gaze of the masses, lay now still and unresisting before them. The dethroned, abandoned one, who had sought his last refuge in the waters of the lake, rested, arrayed with all the insignia of the Kingdom, upon his bier; the restless soul had entered into peace.

The sorrowing folk moved solemnly and pathetically past their dead King. The officer in brilliant uniform next the peasant in his Sunday clothes, ladies of the fashionable world, clad in deepest mourning, next to the country women, who had thrown a black shawl over their shoulders as the sign of extreme grief; hoary age, next to blooming youth. All alike felt in their inmost hearts the tragedy of the King's fate, all alike had tears of sympathy for the life extinguished in its full bloom of manhood, the life of him, once called the favorite of the Gods. Yes, many broke into sobs and loud laments as soon as they stepped out of the palace into the street and their hearts gave vent to the strain of woe.

Count Adlershorst, released from his confinement, was one of the first at the side of the bier of his Royal friend, to see once more that dear head, from which, in spite of all his love, all his self-sacrifice, all his struggle, he had not been able to avert this terrible catastrophe. He remained long in silent contemplation. Whatever of bitter pain passed through his soul, his pale, immoveable countenance did not betray. — And yet, he could have cried out in unspeakable agony. Why must this happen? Why must this fine sensitive heart so soon be broken, this noble power so soon be destroyed?

With him were the true friends of the departed, the Wallburgs, father and son, the elder man entirely stricken by the blow, the family von Feldau, George von Randau, and even Father Berner, leaning on the arm of his deacon passed mournfully on to view the dead body.

Outside the palace the Count touched George's arm and drew him to one side. "I have to beg a favour of you, Herr von Randau."

"I am entirely at your service, Count Adlershorst."

"You know, that I have still a rascal to call to account. I beg you to be my second and to take my challenge to him."

George looked up at the Count with a terrified expression but the latter permitted no answer. "Lose no words about it, dear Randau, I am decided."

"But the Countess," ventured George to ejaculate.

A cloud settled on the brow of the Count.

"I have considered all, everything. But I owe it to him," he pointed to the palace, "and Paula will understand. My hope is in God and my just cause."

George did not reply. Silently he took the summons of the Count and they parted pressing each others hands.

Reaching his house, the Count at once knocked on the door of Paula's boudoir. She received the beloved, unexpectedly recovered husband with deepest affection. He leaned his head on her shoulder, and, strong man as he was, he was not ashamed to let his tears flow freely.

Paula drew him to her side on a divan near, and softly stroked his hair. They sat thus silently for a long time, wordless, yet each understanding.

"Oh, if I could but shake the dust of this town, of this land from my feet," he broke forth passionately.

"You can as soon as you wish," answered she softly. "Where thou goest, I will go. I follow you."

He arose, embraced her passionately, covered her face and her hands with his kisses. "My lovely, sweet wife. If the dream were reality. If we dared have a home far from here, where sad memories must always oppress us, a quiet home among simple people, who would love us and whom we could make happy."

"And why should that not be possible? asked she gazing at him with her earnest eyes full of devotion. "Trust in God. His hand wounds, but it also heals."

"Yes, we must trust in God," repeated he. His eyes fell upon a casket of finest bronze work in Rocco-style. It was the gift, which the King had commissioned George to bring to him. The spring responded to a light pressure, and the casket opened, revealing a miniature portrait of the King enclosed in a costly gold frame. A note in the King's handwriting lay beside it, bearing the words: "A remembrance for my noble friend.

Even though this gift has so little value yet I can offer nothing better. To be sure it was once in possession of her, who was dearest to me in this world, the only one who has really loved me. Her picture, which has been framed together with mine, will accompany me to the grave. Lippert will take care for that. And now, farewell, my dearest one, and be not angry with me, if I have given you pain, if I still must give you pain. Think kindly of your King, who has always recognized your full worth, and to whom for many years, you have been the only light on his path of life."

The Count's hand trembled. His eyes rested long on the beautiful features, which looked up at him with so beaming, so happy an expression.

"And now dust and ashes," murmured he. "Nothing but the memory of a star which rose gloriously, gradually darkened, and suddenly went out in the night. Requiescat in pace."

The next day the body of the King was conducted to the royal vault with all the pomp and ceremony belonging to Majesty. Costlier than all the splendour, all the pomp, dearer than all the flowers, all the tapers, were the tears of gratitude and love, which were poured out from deeply moved hearts. Threatening clouds covered the sky, but a brilliant ray of sunshine fell like a greeting from heaven upon the coffin, before it disappeared in the tomb.

Then immediately the sky darkened, and before the Royal mourners could reach their carriages, a flash of lightning quivered through the air, which for a moment lighted up with its blue glare the entire scene with ghastly luster.

Horror seized the crowd. Was this a sign from heaven, a sign of divine wrath? Silently, filled with anxious forebodings they pursued their homeward way. The equipages drove quickly away in the driving rain. In one of these leaned back a woman with heavy black veil, at whose side was a bowed old man, nervously pulling his gray mustache.

"They might have stayed away," whispered to her companion a trim young woman hurrying along on the sidewalk under her dripping umbrella. "Do you not know her? She is the Baroness von Ebersdorf, the intriguer, from whose house so many of the lies came, which led to the fall of our most gracious Master."

"Yes, I know her, I know her, Bärbel," was the answer. "God will certainly punish her for her villany. You can see how the evil spirit looks out of her eyes. Look, look now, Bärbel, as she throws back her veil. Holy virgin, the living death stands written on her face, as if she had not a drop of warm blood in her."

The two women, the farmer's daughter and Bärbel, the young wife of Sepp, the doorkeeper, stopped a moment on the sidewalk opposite the house of Baron von Ebersdorf where the carriage halted, that they might see them alight.

"This world is really a comedy," croaked the Baron in his unpleasing falsetto voice, as he entered his salon. "First all depends on deposing the King. One can't do enough to injure him, and now the moment he is dead and his rule at an end, they shriek still louder at his loss, as if everything had been buried with him — and you too — Ludmilla, you too. *Au fond, c'est absurde, ma chère.*"

A ghastly smile played upon her lips. "It is the image of God that has fallen," murmured she, "and when the gods fall, it becomes dark in Valhalla and men tremble."

The Baron gazed with half open mouth at his wife, quite mystified.

"I fear, *ma chère amie*," snuffled he in his usual way, "the whole affair is too exciting for your nerves. You rant."

She did not answer.

By this time they were seated at the table, the servants had brought in the meal. The Baron ate with relish, but Ludmilla left her plate untouched. Her eyes gazed fixedly into vacancy and only when they fell upon her husband did they gleam with aversion and scorn.

As soon as the meal was finished the Baron withdrew into his chamber for his usual midday rest.

"*Au revoir, ma bonne*," murmured he, "and may you soon feel better."

Ludmilla gazed after him vacantly, then turned slowly, entered her room, and as if wearied to death, threw herself into a chair. A few minutes later she sprang up again. Grasping a bundle of letters already laid together she stepped to the fireplace and striking a light burned the papers, one after another. With thoughtful eyes she followed the course of the dying flames then breathing deeply, threw back her head.

"All is over," whispered she, "all is over. Thou callest me, thou blessed Dead. I follow thee!" Her eyes flashed with a wild light. "Where thou goest," murmured she absently, "I will go. Where thou stayest,

I will stay. Thy God shall be my God." Suddenly she paused. "Darest thou, sinner, to call on the name of God," sounded a voice within her. She shuddered. Had she really believed in God, that she should thus tremble before His Name? Death ends all. To see no more, to feel no more, that were blessedness, and this blessedness might not be withheld even from her.

Hastily wrapping her dark raincoat about her, she put on her hat and drew her veil closely over her face.

"Whom do I injure, if I withdraw from the stage sooner than the director of the world's theater had intended? Who will miss me? Who will mourn for me? No one in the whole world, no one. Why did I ever live? What was the purpose of my miserable existence? A phantom, an illusion led me on till I, stumbling, sank in the marsh."

Slowly she left the room. All was still in the corridor. The servants were at table. From the servants hall came voices and laughter. She regarded it not, but hurried rapidly down the stairs. Quietly closing the house-door behind her, she tarried a moment and cast one last look behind her.

Still the rain poured down ceaselessly. She signalled a passing cab. "To the station," said she to the driver, and the cab rattled away over the pavements. The occupant of the carriage, accustomed to reclining on soft cushions in her light running equipage, was thrown violently to and fro, but she seemed unconscious of the motion.

In spite of the terrible weather, there was a great crowd at the station. A mass of people rushed for the train in order to return home after the ceremonies of the

entombment. Ludmilla bought a ticket first class for the Seeschloss. She had hoped to be alone, but was disappointed. Two old men, who had feared the crowd in the second class compartments, entered the carriage with her and Ludmilla shuddered with fear. She knew them both, Father Berner and the old Forster Wallburg. She also perceived outside the voice of her cousin, Herr von Feldau, calling out to his father-in-law with a glance in her direction.

"There are too many of us. Let us go into another coupé. We shall meet at the Seeschloss."

Ludmilla shrank back to the corner and drew her veil more closely over her face. But her concern was unnecessary. The two old men, entirely lost in reflections, saw her not. Once the Forester broke forth forgetting her presence into a loud lament. "My God and Saviour, it breaks my heart to have lived to see this."

With trembling aged voice, the priest replied: "Be still, it is God's hand, old friend. He rests softly and we shall soon follow him," and quietly repeated the verse:

"There shall we see with a vision clear,
Bright day shall follow the darksome night,
There, with joy shall we all declare:
Father! thou hast done all things right."

Ludmilla's heart was convulsed. "Foolish men and yet much to be envied with their childish faith," thought she. "Can an Almighty Power really be over us and permit such things? No, it can not be, there is nothing to fear after the dark gate closes behind us, nothing." Yet she shivered. Why then did she wish

to die? Could she not again bring back the joy of life? If she could only forget, could only subdue her heart!

But who can forget what is written in burning letters on the heart, who? And to thus live on, merely exist, as at present — nevermore. And what, at the most, could the future bring her? Her role was played out, she was old. What had formerly given her pleasure, was the power of her beauty and her intellectual attraction over the hearts of men; even that had suddenly become meaningless to her. To be sure, if she showed herself docile in the hands of Herr von Gleichen and his party, she could still further play a part in society, still further intrigue, still deceive, still bow and kneel before the great ones on earth. But — to what end, for what purpose? And to live by the favor of that man, whom she secretly hated, whom she had only intended to use as a means to an end, but who really had used her to his advantage, and had made of her a despised, yes, a self-despised woman? It was unthinkable.

The station by the Seeschloss was soon reached. In spite of torrents of falling rain, hundreds pushed on to the palace, to see the place of the catastrophe, where the shocking death had taken place. Ludmilla joined the moving multitude. At the place on the border of the lake, where the King's body had been found, the procession halted. Sobs and voices of weeping were heard on all sides. Some picked twigs and leaves from the surrounding bushes to take with them as mementoes of the dead. Others threw bunches of flowers into the lake, a last tribute to that watery grave in which that noble spirit had breathed itself out. At last the weather

had its way, and drove all home, except Ludmilla. She threw back her veil and gazed about her. She believed herself to be alone. Her eye lighted up in triumph.

"Living thou hast spurned my love," murmured she, "but thou canst not hinder me, if I permit the same waves to embrace me in death, which have cradled thy corpse."

Had she spoken aloud? She was hardly conscious of doing so, but even then? What mattered it, if some one had heard her? A few minutes more and the world would be behind her. Suddenly she felt her shoulder clutched, herself powerfully drawn back.

"You, Baroness Ebersdorf!" rang a sharp voice behind her. "Has your cowardly soul not even enough reverence for the place, consecrated by Your King's death, to preserve it from pollution with this impurity? And do you not know, that here upon this same spot an innocent woman struggled with death into which you had driven her? Away! I say away! Has your existence become a burden to you, wretched creature? Will you cast it away? Then turn your steps to a place, where you will not outrage the dead by the nearness of your shadow."

Ludmilla had turned around. She stared with glassy eyes at the dignified face of the old Forester, whose countenance was stamped with a holy wrath. Her lips moved without bringing forth a sound. Then she turned and stole with bowed form out of the reach of the threateningly upraised hand of the angry man.

"Where I may not outrage the dead by the nearness of my shadow," repeated she tremblingly. "The old

man is right. How could I dare to drink my death potion out of the same waters, where his pure lips had drunken?"

With a tired step she wandered farther. Whither? Even this broad grave of water was closed to her, the accursed one. The lake was soon behind her, but the forest was near. Now the way became clear to her, she had entered a free field. The rain had ceased and the sun was sending its last evening beams in her direction from the suddenly lighted horizon. She turned away quickly. To see the sun once more, to see the light of day after her soul had already wandered into the night of Death! Nevermore! With anxious feet she hastened into the darkness of the wood. Her dress caught upon a thorn, she stopped to unfasten it, drove the thorn deeply into the flesh of her arm, and dark drops of blood burst forth. Then, like a solution of her question, flashed a thought through her mind. "Dark fate, do you thus show me the way?"

She took from her pocket a small case containing a sketch book with pencil and pen-knife, which she always carried with her. Why had she not sooner thought of this? This little knife should be her saviour, her last comforter. Throwing herself under a tree, she looked lovingly at the little weapon. Then stretching back her arm — she pierced an artery and it was done. Drawing her mantle closely over her limbs, she laid her head against a tree and closed her eyes.

"Die," she breathed, "die, sink into nothingness."

Chapter XXVIII.

Driven by inward anguish, Paula had arisen earlier than usual.

While still half asleep in the heavy exhaustion which had followed so many wakeful nights of sorrow and anxiety, she dreamily perceived that her husband had quietly left her side and slipped from the room. But now with the full return of consciousness she realized that he had gone the way her anxious heart had foreseen, the fearful and yet righteous way of vengeance.

Emma Waldow found her that morning with her brow pressed against the window ledge, and hands folded in her lap as if in quiet prayer.

"In the name of all that is holy, Countess, what is the matter?"

Paula pressed the hand of this true friend.

"O Emma, I have not yet suffered enough. The worst is about to come, perhaps has already happened."

And with quivering lips Paula told her her fears.

"I have long felt, that my husband would and must, as soon as he was free, call this traitor to account."

Emma nodded.

Both sat in anxious silence.

Then suddenly they heard the sound of carriage-wheels in the street below. Paula sprang up, leaned eagerly out of the window and gave a cry of joy.

"He has come back uninjured, and George is with him, your George!"

She flew down the stairs, not heeding the curious glances of the servants, and laughing and crying threw herself into her husband's arms.

He clasped her closely, and half led, half carried her into the room above. The door closed behind them.

"Paula, my beloved wife," he cried, and gently laying her on the sofa, sank on one knee by her side. "Can you forgive me, that I have had to put this new burden upon you?"

"I know you could not do otherwise," she replied and pressed her tear-stained face to his.

"No, I could not do otherwise, and yet — yet — I have experienced something strange —"

"What? "Oh tell me — what about Count Goldberg?"

"He lives, Paula, thank God, he lives."

She looked at him with joyful eyes and yet questioningly.

Did you wish to kill him?" asked she in a low voice.

"I wished it, yes, and went to the duelling place with the firm intention, if God gave him into my hand, of shooting him down like a dog. There he stood opposite me, pale, hollow-eyed, a picture of dreadful remorse. Then, as he, the offender, made ready to shoot first, I saw his hand trembled. The bullet flew over my head, and the thought went through my soul, like a message from heaven: "Do you, presumptuous man, believe that God needs you, to punish whom He wishes to punish? Not to you belongs judgment. Leave it to Him, who knows how to find the sinner, even if he seems to mock His justice with jests and laughter, with pomp and gayety. — And my hand gave a quick movement, the bullet which should have passed through the faithless heart, glanced to one side. His arm, raised to fire again, dropped to his side, pierced by my bullet."

"Oh Alphonse," cried Paula, "let us thank God, that your hand is free from blood."

"And I shall renounce from now on all use of weapons, unless the Fatherland should again need protection."

"What, Alphonse, you will —?"

"Demand my dismissal, and at once."

She clung tenderly to him.

"So that was the reason why you still delayed, why you doubted the fulfilment of our dream of a quiet retreat? Oh you cruel one, not to confide completely in me!"

"Why should I plunge you into care and anxiety unnecessarily?"

"You were right, you are always right."

Meanwhile George in a neighboring room had acquainted Emma with the result of the duel. They were sitting together in a confidential talk, when the door of the corridor was pushed open and Baron Ebersdorf came staggering in with face white as death.

"Where is my daughter," he shrieked, looking frenziedly around. "Call my daughter! I must speak with her!"

And groaning he sank into a chair.

Emma hastened to knock on the Count's door, while George sympathizingly drew near the old Baron and sought to learn the cause of his agitation.

At first he looked at the young man rather suspiciously, then he remembered that George was a gentleman and his own relation, and he burst into a torrent of words. His wife, he said, had left the house yesterday and had not yet returned.

"Oh, this affront before the world! I can not bear it, I can not bear it!" he repeated unceasingly.

George could not keep from smiling. It was the fear of an affront, that excited the Baron so violently, not anxiety about his missing wife.

Now the Count and Paula came in, utterly perplexed, when they learned what had happened. There at once flashed through Paula's mind the remembrance of that scene in the Schweizerhaus, when her stepmother had confessed her passion for the King and, motioning her husband to one side, she hastily whispered the story to him. He at once made up his mind what to do. He requested George to accompany him, and they set off for the Lake Castle in the vicinity of which he, not without reason, suspected that he might find the missing Baroness.

In the meantime Paula and Emma busied themselves in quieting the Baron, who seemed gradually to become comfortable under the kind ministrations which he had lacked since Paula's departure, and he bore with comparative composure the dreadful tidings brought him a few hours later. A wood-cutter had found the body of the Baroness, and it had been brought into the common-hall of the nearest village. The Count and his companion had no difficulty in recognizing her and bringing her back to the city.

A few days later she was buried with all the pomp befitting her position and wealth.

A report of heart failure was given out and none of her acquaintances had an idea of the true state of affairs. Too great an interest was still felt in the King's tragic end for the people to turn lightly to something else.

The Baron was thus spared that which he so greatly feared; an affront before the world.

Count Adlershorst had arranged for his dismissal, but before this was granted, he was commanded to visit the Prince Regent. With most painful emotions he obeyed the summons. After all that had happened, he would have preferred to avoid this meeting. He feared he would be asked something about his last interview with the King, concerning which he wished to keep a sacred silence. But nothing of the kind occurred. The Duke was most gracious and wanted only to know what were his reasons for wishing to resign. If the supposition that there was ill-will toward him on account of the unfortunate occurrences in the mountains had determined his action, the Duke would take this opportunity to personally assure him of the contrary. He valued, as his deceased nephew had done, the true worth of the Count and would be glad to keep him in his army.

The Count expressed the thanks which the occasion demanded, but remained firm in his resolution, to retire to private life.

As soon as he returned home, he embraced his wife and cried joyfully:

"That was the last bridge to be burned. Now we are free."

With the willing consent of his wife and her father, who, after the loss of Ludmilla likewise shook off the dust of the Capital from his feet, he sold all his possessions and bought a large estate in the north of Germany. The estate was rich in surrounding forests, the management of which was to be given over to George at the time soon approaching, when he should have completed his

studies. Emma, as her lover had prophesied, had received a warm welcome in the house of his parents, where she planned to remain until the wedding.

Before Count Adlershorst left his home for ever, he went once more to the place, where his Royal friend had sought and found his last rest. On a beautiful autumn day he journeyed with Paula to the Seeschloss, which had become a place of pilgrimage, where from far and near people gathered, impelled both by sympathy and curiosity. Standing close together in silent sympathy, the husband and wife gazed long upon the clear water, which sparkled so innocently in the bright sunshine. It seemed as though no horror could here have been enacted, no tragedy could here have been accomplished. The eyes of both were wet.

They saw once more, as in a vision, the bright form of the King, so beautiful, so promising — and yet so early shadowed by suffering, so soon broken — and destroyed. With a sigh the Count turned away and quietly repeated the lines, the great poet has sung so gloriously over the limitations of mankind.

Denn mit Göttern
Soll sich nicht messen
Irgend ein Mensch.
Hebt er sich aufwärts
Und berührt
Mit dem Scheitel die Sterne,
Nirgends haften denn
Die unsichern Sohlen,
Und mit ihm spielen
Wolken und Winde.

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